

Thanks, Sorry. Sure. by lavenderlow

Category: Stranger Things (TV 2016)

Genre: Alternate Universe - Normal Life, Depression, Falling In Love, Fluff, Jonathan and Steve are a true power couple, Jonathan and Steve are just two angsty teens, M/M, Mentions of Mental Illness, Past Abuse, Period Typical Attitudes, Period-Typical Homophobia, Slurs, Suggestive Themes, and i love them both so much, mentioned past abuse, nancy is a mom

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Summary:

"My name is Steve Harrington. My favorite color is hunter green. I like baseball, swim, hair gel and meeting new people. I want to know everything about you that you can tell me. I'm officially signing up to be your bodyguard, best friend, and effective tomorrow afternoon, the person you tutor for math."

It was 1983, and nothing weird was happening in Hawkins, Indiana.

The only weird thing was that Jonathan couldn't place his finger on why Steve Harrington was interested in him.

1. Part of a Norm

Author's Note:

hey whats up guys!!!

ive tried so many times to write long, chaptered and developed stories. if you've read any of my past works you can see how those turned out.

this is my first one that im actually excited about and committed to. i really hope you guys enjoy my writing and my ideas for where i take this story!

basically, jonathan is just what he calls a "normal" kid, because it's not unusual for him to get bullied and at this point he really does not care to the point where when he gets beat up he doesn't really mind and steve is just here trying to show him that he's more than what they call him and he deserves to feel like hes not normal cause he's extraordinary okay it makes a lot more sense in the actual story

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Here was exactly where Jonathan did not want to be. He stood in the courtyard of his high school, the only high school in Hawkins, Indiana, looking out at the sparse array of students walking. He looked at his watch on his wrist, which was ten minutes behind. He was an hour early to first block.

If he didn't want to be here, why was he? Maybe it was the fact that he had a test he had to take this morning and he happened to slip up and accidentally tell his mom- and she forced him to actually come and take it. Maybe it was that he just wanted to get away from his mother and his little brother as they both insisted that he go to school and take said test the next morning. His mom, Joyce, got angry at him when he said he didn't want to, and she had used a threatening voice for the first time in a long time, like the ones she used to get when she got angry with his dad, Lonnie. She was still angry this morning, so he decided that getting in the car with her to go to school an hour and thirty minutes before he usually left was okay.

As Jonathan walked around the courtyard, he got stares. It wasn't unusual for him- a kid, a turtleneck, shaggy, untouched hair and a camera slung around his side along with a battered messenger bag. Looked suggestive to a majority of his peers. They called him an array of names, all starting all the way back from fourth grade to now. One of his personal favorites was "pretty boy", because what was wrong with being called pretty? Others included more suggestive terms, insensitive ones and plain unoriginals created by the freshman "bullies", following in the footsteps of the ones in junior year that really stuck it to Jonathan, considering that was his year. One of the worst was Billy Hargrove, a stereotypical "popular" boy with a big group of friends, a lot of money, and a big ego. Billy usually liked to follow him around in the halls, his posse behind him, laughing while they threw crumpled up pieces of paper saying who knows what. Another personal favorites of Jonathan's was the death threats and the threats that they'd tell his family he was a "queer." Other kids, especially girls, stood at their lockers while they laughed as they looked on, covering their smiles and their blush as they watched Billy Hargrove, one of the hottest boys in the year, pick on Jonathan Byers- the queer.

As more students entered the school, Jonathan realized he now only had about forty five minutes to take his test- the one his chemistry teacher said would take an hour to do. But did he come to school with the intention to actually take this test? No, he didn't. So he decided to walk around the woods along the school outskirts until the bell rung.

As Jonathan started walking to the woods, he grabbed his camera off the side of him and held it in his hands. It was a new one, too, his mom had just bought it for him for his birthday. He had a new roll of film and ample opportunity to use it, so he intended to at least find something along the woods worthy of a photo. He wishes that maybe his friend Nancy was here, because she always seemed good at finding nice things to photograph, like honey-yellow flowers or a vibrant leaf on the ground. Sometimes, even, he would give into her requests for him to take a portrait of her, and it was always nice to see her smile after he gave her the photo of her smiling, lit by a ray of sunshine.

He sat on the floor or the forest for a while, mostly spending his time twiddling his thumbs. His mom took away his Walkman the night before- while she sent him off to his room. He watched, through the cracks of the trees, as more people came flooding in the school, one by one. They stood around and looked for their friends, or ran to their beginning duties in clubs or such. He could see bits and pieces of Billy's posse, but he didn't see all of them yet. Jonathan decided that it would be best that he head off to class when he sees them all leave. It would take a while though, Jonathan knew that, because as he looked down at his watch (a cheap one he got from the local goodwill) and it read that there was still a good twenty minutes until the morning bell rung. Today was obviously not going to go by very fast, and it felt like time was a sticky mess in front of him, and he had to walk through it for the whole day. It put him in an off mood as he knew that it would make everything worse in the hallways, in all the classes that he had Billy or whatever clique member he had to interact with throughout the day- which he saw at least one of them per every class and every moment of the day. It was a never ending torture.

About ten minutes before the bell rang, Jonathan decided that it was a good time to start walking to the school again. He grabbed his camera and placed it back around his side, on top of his messenger bag. He stood up and dusted himself off, though it didn't really do much. All his clothes were hand me downs from his father, Lonnie, who had sent them over mail a few weeks ago. They were battered and torn, not to mention they also reeked like whisky and cigarettes, but that wasn't unusual for his father. What was unusual was the fact that his father actually sent him mail; nonetheless, clothes. That wasn't like him, considering Jonathan hasn't talked to his father since he left, over three years ago, and Lonnie has made no effort to talk to him either.

Once Jonathan got back on the schools campus, he already had an unsettled feeling. He looked around and all he heard was snickering as he walked into the courtyard, but that wasn't anything alarming, considering he always had people laughing at him or staring at him. Jonathan Byers- the freakshow- got a lot of attention in a small town school. Suddenly, Jonathan felt a heavy hand land on his shoulder, stopping him in his tracks and whipping him around. There, he faced

Tommy H., one of Billy's friends and "members" of his clique.

"Hey, pretty boy! Where's your girlfriend? Ain't here to protect you, huh?" Tommy came closer to him, chests almost touching. Tommy looked down on him, considering he had a good four or five inches on him. In terms of girlfriend, he assumed he was talking about his friend, Nancy, who was in fact, not his girlfriend- and also, not here, as it seemed. To be fair, Nancy was just a friend that was a girl and that Jonathan had no interest in romantically. And in these revelations, Jonathan realized he was royally fucked, because Nancy hadn't shown up to school that day. She was usually the one to get him out of tricky situations- and the ones to tell off Tommy, Carol, and Billy, the kids that tormented him the most. "Wait," Tommy continued. "I'm sorry, I messed up. You don't have girlfriend, because you're the queer. Queer for what? Twenty dollars?" Tommy started laughing hysterically along with an excess group of hooligans, muttering other things as they walked away to go chat up some girls on the other side of the courtyard. Jonathan couldn't really bring himself to think about their words- considering they've used the same insult a good four or five times. It wasn't even good, anyway, just something you'd see written on the stall in the bathrooms in Sharpie or something you'd say when you have horse-shit to say else. To bide away the rest of the time he maybe could stay free of more torment, Jonathan decided that maybe the best thing to do for right now is just go to his locker and put away his things. If he was lucky- even though he never was- he might not even run into his history teacher, so he wouldn't have to hear him bicker about him not showing up to take his test.

Jonathan ran into another problem after fourth block, as he was walking out to the buses. Things had been okay throughout the day. He had a mustard stain on his white t-shirt, thanks to Carol, but with a simple tuck in of his shirt he managed to fix it. His history teacher did in fact bicker at him, saying "I saw you this morning-" and "Boy, you will fail if you keep this up" but Jonathan couldn't bring himself to care when his whole day was spent weaving through a crowd of

hormonal teenagers and trying to protect himself if Billy or any one of his friends happened to show up. But, as the school day came to an end, Jonathan was stuck on a wall adjacent to the bus loading zones, held down by Billy himself. As others started to crowd around in a circle, Billy moved one of his hands from Jonathan's shoulder to his neck, pressing down just hard enough that Jonathan knew by the time he got home there would be a bruise. Occasionally, Billy would let go just the slightest so Jonathan could breathe. Maybe he was doing it on purpose and maybe he wasn't. Hopefully, it was the former. It was probably just so that Jonathan could be kept conscious while Billy and his friends all looked on at him and laughed. Jonathan and Billy locked eyes for a few moments, in which Billy said to him, "You're dead if you come to school tomorrow, fag. Dead." With that, Billy dropped Jonathan to the ground, where he tried to start picking up his things and walk to his bus, but the kids around him grew quiet. They did not move out of their circle around the two. One of the kids from the crowd started snickering, then the rest, then it erupted into a sea of laughter. One voice stood out, one of Billy's friends, probably, chanting "Fight!" and suddenly, Jonathan became very scared. Billy was obviously bigger than he was, and no doubt stronger, so when Billy's blue eyes locked with Jonathan's, with a primal rage in them as he laughed along with the chant, Jonathan couldn't help but be *fucking terrified*. The rest of the crowd slowly followed suit, chanting the same words in quick succession, closing in the circle around them, forcing them to play to their tricks. There were no adults in sight, and Jonathan started to feel as if the walls were closing in, the circle was getting tighter, and Billy was staring him down with his fists raised. He was terrified. Billy, obviously, was not.

"You wanna fight back, queer? Huh? You've got no one to save you now- it's you and me, baby." Billy wiped sweat from his brow and quickly came running for Jonathan.

The first punch came with no hesitation. Jonathan felt his left cheek start to throb as he stumbled back, holding his face as his messenger bag and his camera swung around his body. He grunted in pain as he felt a trickle of blood down his face, probably from one of Billy's rings. He could see out of the slits of his eyes Billy walking around the circle, then suddenly stop in front of him. His vision was blurry

and he was completely disoriented, a trip in his step as he tried to step back. The crowd was going wild, screams loud. He could hear adults yelling, too, but the horde of teens wasn't separating. At this point, it was almost the whole school crowded around them, Jonathan was sure of it, but he was cut off as he felt the first blow straight to his stomach. Kids screamed at the top of their lungs, like on roller coasters, or like this was some sick dog show for all of them to enjoy. Jonathan fell to the ground, his camera and bag disregarded under him, probably crushed from the impact. He couldn't bring himself to care, though, as he saw Billy's shoe come closer to him. The kick came hard, stomping on his arm and Jonathan was sure he heard a crack as he felt a stabbing pain course through his body. He couldn't help himself, he started seething in pain, and he saw as more people entering the tight circle with Billy. There was a kick to his leg, not as hard as the first two, obviously by someone else. He knew it was because Billy's shoes were right in front of his face. The moment Jonathan saw his foot being lifted up, he braced for impact for his head to be bashed in, it was over right now, he'd be lying dead on the ground in front of the school. The brainwashed kids were still cheering, hyping up the boys with Billy as Jonathan writhed in pain and anticipation, trying his best not to scream as tears stung at his eyes. With a surge of yelling by brute kids, Billy's shoe came down on Jonathan's arm once again. He screamed in pain as he heard Billy scream to the crowd. He felt blood flowing from his face and scrapes all over his body where there would be bruises later. As the screams got louder, they suddenly broke off as Jonathan saw new feet walking towards him through the slits of his eyes. He was about to pass out from pain and maybe blood loss, but adrenaline to make it through was keeping him up. Whoever came in, it was adults, administrators, teachers, maybe a stray student that cared about him- Jonathan didn't care. They broke up the crowd and pulled Billy and his posse back, and ushered everyone away. The fight was over, and Jonathan definitely did not win.

When he woke up, he was in his room. How, he really didn't know, but given that he suspected that it was a student that had picked him up and taken him home. He'd be in the hospital if it had been an ambulance, and lord was he glad he wasn't there- his family was too poor to afford school clothes, let alone hospital bills. But, who in that crowd would be willing to drag Jonathan out of that mess? Pretty much the whole school was there, so someone had to have been watching before they started to feel mercy, pity or some other feeling. Honestly, Jonathan didn't really care, because at least he was at home, and not dead at the hands of Billy Hargrove.

He got up from bed, feeling an intense pain in his ribs. What did he expect when he basically just got his brains smashed in by the biggest douche in the school? He tried to work through the pain as best as he could as he made his way over to the bathroom across the hall. As he walked in, he looked at himself in the mirror. His left eye was swollen and badly bruised, with yellow edges around all the way up to his brow bone. He had a gash on his cheek, where Billy's ring hit him, and both his top and bottom lips were cut in different spots. This was probably the worst he's ever looked, which isn't saying much, because Jonathan never looked good.

As he turned on the water in the shower, he took the time to examine the rest of his body. He stripped himself of his shirt and inspected the deep bruises he had littered on his sides, deep blue and purple just like the one on his eye. He ran his hand over them, wincing at the pain of a feather light touch. He tried to stretch, but to no avail, as pain stopped him from doing so. He gave up and started to take off his pants, looking at tinier, speckled bruises all around his thighs and calves. He was really beat up this time. It wasn't unusual to come home with a bruise on his arm after getting pushed into a wall, or a scratched up hand after catching his fall when someone trips him. But he has never come home looking like this.

Jonathan stepped into the shower and immediate bliss went through his body. The hot water was a salvation to him; it loosened up his tense muscles and nursed his bruised as they became more tender and he was able to move around a bit more without feeling immense pain. He picked his head up to look straight into the stream of water, (with his eyes closed, of course) and felt the water hit his face and

soften up his black eye.

He stepped out of the stream of water and hit his back on the wall of the shower. As he rubbed his eyes and opened them again, he slid down the wall to sit down under the stream. The water hit his head with a gentle *pat* as it nursed him into thinking about the day's twist of events. Who was this mysterious kid that dragged him out of that hellhole? How did he know where he lived? Had he interacted with any of his family? Oh, Jesus, Jonathan really hoped Will, his little brother, was not home when he was probably dragged in. It would break Will's heart to see his brother hurt like that, probably. His relationship with his brother had always been strong, and it got even tighter knit after their father left. Will had only been eight, and he was heartbroken when he realized that his dad wouldn't be coming back, so automatically twelve year old Jonathan stepped in to help raise him and help his mother out.

Jonathan stood up and shut off the shower, stepping out and grabbing a towel. He wrapped it around his waist and stood in the fog of the bathroom for a good minute or so, before looking over to the mirror. He saw himself in the reflection, and wiped off the condensation to see tears streaming down his face. He wiped them away quickly and he was left confused and worried. Why was he crying, and why hadn't he noticed it? He assumed it was probably because his face was too numb from the pain to register them, and the thought of that satisfied Jonathan's worry for long enough for him to forget about it.

"What even happened out there, Jonathan?" His mother had been questioning him since she got home, about an hour after his shower. Will was at his friend's house, and so it alleviated any fears he had that Will had seen him get helplessly dragged inside their home. Apparently, It had only been about an hour Steve had slept after school, and he hadn't been in a days-long coma like he kind of hoped

had happened.

“Jonathan, hello?” Joyce waved her hand in front of his face to get his attention once again. He shook his head to clear his mind of his racing thoughts as he looked at his mother from across the kitchen.

“Nothing, mom, it’s just Billy... his normal stuff, okay?” Jonathan tried to brush off the situation as best as he could. His mom was obviously stressed, and Jonathan didn’t want to burden her any more than need be as a teenage boy.

“Yes, honey, but his ‘normal stuff’ is never this bad. Never. You need to go to someone about it, your school, me...someone, Jonathan.” She walked across the kitchen and held Jonathan’s face in her hands, rubbing her thumb across the edges of Jonathan’s black eye. “My poor baby-”

“Mom, please. I’m not a kid, I can handle this myself. Don’t baby me.” Jonathan backed away from his mother’s embrace and he saw the look in her eyes falter. He felt bad as he watched her sigh and walk back over to her place in the kitchen as she continued to make dinner. Jonathan wanted to say something else, but he figured that it wasn’t the right time. He started a sad walk back to his room, surveying around the area. It was dark outside and there was only one light source in his room, a tiny lamp in the corner. He suddenly remembered that his camera was on him during the fight, and he started frantically searching for it around his room, hoping that the mysterious person that brought him home maybe had brought it back with him. He tore up his bed, his dresser, his closet, everywhere in his room, top to bottom, and he still didn’t find it. He grew frustrated until he forcefully sat himself down on his bed with a grunt and a face that obviously put his anger and his frustration on display. How could he let his camera, the one his mom gave him, go missing, let alone be destroyed in a fight? How would he tell her? How is he going to get over the unmistakable pile of guilt in his stomach after realizing he will probably never, ever get it back, because it was probably smashed to smithereens.

He fell back on his bed, because he was so overwhelmed with frustration and sadness and anger that he knew he had to calm down. He tossed and turned and messed up his sheets even more, paying

little to no regard as to how his room looked after his massacre of looking for his camera. As he tossed over to the wall, close to his dresser, he realized something. He picked his head up as he saw a small slip of paper, a regular yellow sticky note, stuck to the dresser. How he hadn't noticed it before was beyond him, but sometimes it felt like a lot of things were beyond him anyway. He picked the note up and read over its very scratchy and minimal handwriting. It gave him a number, and simple "please call me." scribbled under it. He could only assume that this was left by the person who had dropped him off at his house, because where else could it have come from?

Jonathan stormed out of his room in a frenzy with the note in hand. He pulled down the phone from the wall so quick it startled his mother in the kitchen, as he heard her faint gasp. He dialed the number quickly, eager to know who it was that brought him home and saved him from near death. He stood in silence and was impatient as the tone rang and rang, leaving him bouncing his leg and crossing his arms.

"Hello?" a voice finally answered and Jonathan shot up.

"Uh- Hey. It's- It's.." Jonathan really didn't know how to introduce himself. He could say something along the lines of "Hey, I'm the kid you dragged out of a fight after he almost died." or "Hey, your number was creepily scribbled on a note on my dresser." He decided to just roll with it, and just say "It's the kid you dragged out of a fight today. It was your number at least, written on my desk.." He trailed off. He probably sounded so stupid and this was all just a prank. He didn't know how it could be a prank, but he just knew it was one.

"Oh, damn, hey! It's Jonathan, right? I've seen you around school a bit." The person on the other line seemed to know what Jonathan was referring to. Hopefully he did, or else Jonathan would look like a complete idiot. He knew the voice sounded familiar, the kid had to be in at least one of his classes, because he knows he hears it on a daily basis.

"It's Steve, by the way. Steve Harrington? We have AP Chemistry together."

Of. Fucking. Course.

Steve Harrington used to be the school's top dog, before Billy Hargrove took over. He fucked around with Jonathan occasionally, and he used to be friends with Tommy and Carol, but nonetheless, Jonathan never really cared for the guy. He walked around with a charming smile, wooing almost every girl he passed, even Nancy. His hair was half as tall as him and he always wore Polo or Izod- and they always looked good on him, too, unlike Jonathan. From seeing the way he acted in class and how he was in the hallway, Steve had his ego inflated to the moon (not as bad as Billy, though) and basically was not someone Jonathan wanted to have to thank. Honestly, he wanted to just hang up the phone, but he also didn't want to seem like a massive bitch- considering Steve *did* kind of save him from almost dying.

"Oh. Steve. Thanks for getting me out of there." He didn't have anything else to say. He wished he had something nicer to say to him, but he didn't. He didn't think he could dig it out of himself, either. He just wanted this conversation to end and he could go back to his room and sleep, maybe eat dinner, but he definitely didn't want anything to do with Steve Harrington and his charming smile.

"Hey, look, I was hoping you'd meet me out somewhere tonight, about midnight, maybe the woods outside of the school," Steve was rushing, Jonathan could tell. He could hear murmurs on the other side of the line as Steve tried to talk over them with a hurried tone in his voice. "We should talk. And I have something to give you. Gotta go." Steve hung up their line and Jonathan was left on the other side once again confused, and utterly shocked about what he just agreed yet didn't consent to doing at midnight tonight. But he now has to go, or else he feels like he's just being an ass. So he checked his watch, the cheap goodwill one, and checked the time. It was 10:30, and right after he put his hand back down, his mother called for him in the kitchen for dinner.

He was okay. He could face him.

At 11:38, Jonathan grabbed a jacket, because it was September, and it was getting cold in Hawkins, Indiana. He slipped it on quickly as he popped open his window, sticking his legs out into the crisp fall air. He dropped out the rest of the way, getting stuck midway as his jacket got caught on his window, but then quickly un-snagging and dropping on the ground his force that irritated his black eye and his (probably) sprained ribs. He got up, though, and brushed himself off, looking around in the pitch black driveway. There weren't any street lights by their house, so Jonathan pulled out his tiny flashlight and flicked it on, shining it out to his bike. It was close to a fifteen minute bike ride, twenty if he actually went to a comfortable speed. So, he strapped his flashlight to his bike and tried to set off.

He wasn't going to admit it, but he was shit at riding a bike. He only did it a few times when he was a kid, and he never formally learned. So now, it's gonna be more of a thirty minute ride after Jonathan tried to get on the bike and push off, but promptly fell off the bike as busted his ass, adding to his bruised body, probably. He did that same thing a few more times, and he thought about not even going to meet Steve, but once he finally got on the bike steadily and started to take off, he was somewhat okay with the idea again.

The air was pleasant. It was clear and a good sixty degrees outside, so a perfect temperature for a windbreaker as he felt the cold air hit his face. It was quiet the entire time, except for the few car engines he heard as they passed by him on his way to the abandoned school campus. The people in the car probably looked at him like he was crazy, biking at midnight, and Jonathan wasn't going to lie when he admitted that he felt kind of crazy, too.

It was 12:14 when Jonathan pulled up at the school. It was completely barren, and it looked creepily ambient in the orange flickering street lights. There was one car in the parking lot, a beat up BMW M535i, if he was right. It was off, and Jonathan could only assume that it was Steve's car. He started to ride by it, then dropped his bike off next to the car, a few spaces over. He dusted himself off again as he tripped somewhat on his fall from the bike. He stood up straight and surveyed the area around him. Jonathan would have to go around the back of the school to get to the woods, so that was

what he started out on doing. He walked around on the empty campus, peering into the windows that only let him see slits through the blinds into dark classrooms. As he continued walking across the campus to the back, he stumbled upon the place where the fight happened earlier that day. Jonathan looked around at the ground. He saw his own blood in splatters on the ground, still somewhat red. If he wasn't the one that got royally screwed, he would be concerned—considering it still looked fresh. He stood at the spot for a few good minutes, remembering small details of the fight. He obviously got hurt pretty bad, judging by the bruising, but Jonathan couldn't remember clear specifics. Maybe that was okay. He didn't know if he wanted to know the extent of what happened.

He came upon the back side of the school by 12:25. He looked at the outskirts of the woods, not seeing anyone standing around it or near the trees. Then, as he was about to turn back and go home, forgetting about the whole incident and the phone call, he watched as a light started shining from inside of the forest.

“Jonathan!” Steve suddenly came running out of the edge of the forest, in a polo shirt and black jeans. A duffle bag swung at his side as he ran to him. He was wearing an Izod sweater over his polo and he really, really fit the description that Jonathan had remembered.. His hair was kind of deflated, though, probably because he didn't get to perfect it before he left. But really, should he trust someone that would *perfect* their hair to go anywhere past 8 pm? No, he shouldn't, so maybe it was a good sign. As Steve came up to Jonathan, Jonathan saw again Steve's enchanting smile, which even looked good in the middle of the night. Jonathan had a black t-shirt on, a baggy windbreaker, ripped jeans, and his hair was probably extremely disheveled. How did a guy like Steve manage to look effortlessly good without trying?

“You have no idea how happy I am to see you up and walking... Billy got you bad out there today.” Steve placed a hand on Jonathan's shoulder and he flinched. Not just because it hurt, because it only kinda did, but also because it was unexpected and people touching him made Jonathan kind of uncomfortable. Well, not just kind of uncomfortable. Very uncomfortable. He wiggled out of the embrace as he looked back to Steve.

“What do you need to talk about?” He said it with little to no expression- he really just wanted to get things over with. Every part of him wanted to not be here. Except the one small part in him that felt weirdly connected to Steve, and his awkwardly nice smile, and the way that he automatically put his hand around him. Jonathan has never considered himself a queer but he has also never really found girls attractive. But why was it Steve Harrington that he had to feel so... weird for?

Scratch that. He did not feel “weird” for Steve Harrington.

“Well, I just wanted to maybe get to know you a bit more. Yanno, without the whole school behind our backs the whole time.” Steve started to walk back into the forest, brushing his hand through his hair as he turned around. Jonathan assumed he was expected to follow, so follow he did.

“Why at midnight, in the woods? That’s...weird.” Jonathan stepped behind him cautiously in case it was a trap or something of the sort. Considering what happened earlier and the fact that Steve used to be involved with some of the people in Billy’s group, he had to be wary of the chances he took. It seemed, though, like he could trust Steve, because there was just some kind of aura that he gave off. Or a way that he acted that Jonathan’s head picked up on. Whatever it was, he felt oddly safe around him.

“I know the woods is king of your element-” Steve was correct. “I see you walking in here sometimes before school starts.” Jonathan had to say that that was kind of creepy. Steve Harrington, watching Jonathan Byers in the morning before school? What kind of world was this- it was like it had suddenly been turned upside down since this morning. He won’t lie, he’s checked out some dudes in the morning around the school. But the way that Steve worded it made it sound like he checked him out too, like the way Jonathan looked at boys like the ones in senior year above him.

“You’re right. Thanks, I guess, for noticing.” Jonathan stopped walking as Steve stopped in front of him, at a clearing in the wood. Steve promptly sat down, holding his flashlight in his hands, shining it up at Jonathan.

“Have a seat, Jonny. I want to know everything you can tell me. I’m officially signing up to be your bodyguard, best friend, and effective tomorrow afternoon, the person you tutor for math.” Steve looked at him with a smile, which was demanding yet playful. Why did Jonathan smile back? He can’t give you an answer. Steve then started laughing, hitting his hand on his knee. “I’m just kidding, dude, I’m not gonna be your bodyguard.” He then started laughing even more, hunching over where he was sitting and looking like he was making an effort to wipe away tears. Jonathan couldn’t lie, he was laughing a little bit too.

“My name is Jonathan Byers. My favorite color is orange. I like photog-” He stopped mid sentence, when he suddenly realized that photography was not a thing he was able to pursue anymore. He remembered the feeling of his camera crunch under him as he fell when Billy punched him, and it made him visibly cringe.

“That reminds me, I have to give something to you!” Steve started rustling around in his bag, suddenly pulling out a box. He handed it to Jonathan, and Jonathan looked at it in surprise and somewhat disbelief. He found it very hard to reach out and take the box from Steve’s hands, but he eventually forced himself to. He opened it with caution, not sure as to what could lay inside, but he was met with a pleasant surprise that was about to bring him to tears as he saw his camera, perfectly repaired. He knew it was his because of the signature scribble he had written on the top of the flash, done in an XACTO blade. He didn’t know how Steve did it, but he did it.

“I don’t know what to say. How did you fix it? I thought it was gone. Completely gone. I don’t know how I can accept this- I-” Jonathan started tripping over his words as he started in awe at his camera, looking almost new again.

“There were only a few things that needed to be fixed. I’m glad you are happy with it. Now- My name is Steve Harrington. My favorite color is hunter green. I like baseball, swim, hair gel and meeting new people. Now keep sitting down, cause we’re going to have a nice conversation about the weather today.”

He didn’t know why, Jonathan had a very good feeling he could put up with this.

2. Something Good Can Work

Summary for the Chapter:

Jonathan doesn't understand how to deal.

Notes for the Chapter:

you see this chapter was supposed to be written in a day (the day after i wrote the first chapter) but i completely tired myself out after writing that much in one day so chapter two took a lil bit longer than expected. sorry for the wait!!

At around four a.m., Jonathan was on his bike, riding home in the cold silence of the night. It was the coldest it had been, probably a chilly fifty five, and Jonathan could feel it as he rode his bike down the empty streets. He saw the lights of some windows on and he heard some low mumbles as he biked across several streets, but for the most part, the little town of Hawkins, Indiana, was quiet.

Hawkins was not exactly the best place, though, to be biking around at any time past midnight. With Jonathan being Jonathan, and his reputation following him, it could be ample time for him and for anyone like him to be jumped, attacked, or worse, killed, by the kids who had it all. They had the popularity, the money, the egos bigger than their own heads, and Jonathan just has to assume that they all want a bigger challenge, and that challenge is to make everyone else's lives around them a living hell.

The night he spent with Steve was good. They stood in the silence in the woods for a while, and sometimes Jonathan and Steve just made eye contact for a bit. Jonathan thought that maybe Steve picked up on the fact that he was uncomfortable and just let them sit in the quiet. Other than that, they talked about random things, like if they were a cat or a dog person, or if they had ever seen a beach. Jonathan slowly realized that he hasn't done many adventurous things in his life.

Steve had asked Jonathan to take a photo of him on his camera. Even

though Jonathan knew it wouldn't look good, he did it anyway. There wasn't good lighting, and it was also pitch black outside, but there was just something in Jonathan that had the urge to take his photo, or at least do this for him. So, he pointed the flashlight in Steve's face at the best angle he could manage and he snapped the picture. As he took the photo out of the slot after it printed, he didn't even have to look at it to know that Steve probably looked beautiful in it. His hazel eyes reflected the light of their dollar store flashlight and his hair shined. He looked absolutely gorgeous.

But why was Jonathan thinking about that?

Anyway, Jonathan still strolled on his bike, listening to the soft hum of the wheels as he rode down the street. As he let the bike run itself down a steep hill, he passed by the Wheeler's house. He quickly braked and he skid a bit past the driveway, but the thing that caught his eye was the fact that Nancy's light in her window was on. He wasn't concerned, no, but he was just confused. It wasn't like Nancy to be up anywhere past midnight. It wasn't even like Nancy to have her blinds open. But as he looked into her window, he saw her silhouette.

Jonathan suddenly realized he was being a massive creep. It wasn't even like one of those scenes where they look in the window and see the girl changing- Jonathan isn't that much of a perv. He was, at this point, very confused about his sexuality though, and he wasn't sure if he would mind seeing Nancy like that anyway-

No, he would mind! Nancy is his best friend and has been for almost all of highschool. If he doesn't straighten his act now, she's going to see him, and he's going to look insane, completely guaranteed. Jonathan swiftly got back onto his bike and continued the rest of the way down the hill.

It didn't take him that long after that to get to his own house. He checked his watch, seeing that the time was only 4:17. Hopefully, no one happened to be awake, and Jonathan could climb back in his window, no questions asked. He didn't really know if his mom would be mad though, because this whole excursion has been the first time Jonathan has been outside in a good few months. He pulled up to the driveway, dropped the bike by the side of the house, and walked up

to his window. He popped it open, trying to make the least amount of noise possible, and quietly slid in head first. As he climbed in, he held his breath as he surveyed the area of his room, and it seemed to be exactly how he left it. He let go and exhaled as he climbed in all the way, standing up and then suddenly seeing a figure in the doorway. Because that was the one part of the room he couldn't see.

"Jonathan Byers," his mother said, leaning on his door frame. "Would you like to tell me why you are sneaking in your window at four o'clock in the morning?" Jonathan stood in shock as he stumbled over his words to tell his mother. One of the one parts of his personality that he was happy with was that he was great at lying.

"Uh- Mom, hey, I was just...I was just out. Working on something for Will's birthday." Jonathan wishes he wasn't lying. Will's birthday would be coming up in two weeks, and he has plans to go out and fix up Castle Byers for the two of them to relish in some old memories. They built it when they were smaller kids, and it took up a week's worth of their summer. But now it's just out there collecting mold and moss, so Jonathan thought it would be a nice gift to his younger brother.

Besides the point, though. Joyce still was standing in his door frame, her pajamas on. Jonathan gulped in anticipation, hoping she would just write it off with a warning rather than an actual serious punishment. She looked at him up and down, looking at the scuff marks on his clothes from all the times he fell off the bike, and she sighed. She mumbled something under her breath as she walked away from Jonathan's room, and if anything was a small victory, that took the cake.

Jonathan found it hard to fall asleep after getting back home. All he could think about was Steve and this all of a sudden, newfound urge he had to be Jonathan's friend. Did he think it was a set up? Yes, he did. Did he think that maybe, somewhere in his heart, Steve genuinely wanted to be Jonathan's friend. It was definitely a long shot.

Steve Harrington used to be the leader of the pack. Tommy H., Carol, and some other kid named Carson Johns used to follow him around everywhere he went. He charmed the girls with his smile and with

every hand that went through his perfect hair, all of the closeted gay boys swooned over him at their lockers. He sometimes picked on Jonathan, maybe just a spit ball aimed towards the back of his head, but every time Jonathan looked back at him, he had an almost apologetic face. Maybe he was forced to do it, he didn't know, all he knew was that he did it. Apparently, one night at some person's party, Billy challenged Steve to a drinking contest. This had only been a few weeks into Billy even living in Hawkins. Of course, Steve wouldn't back down, so they drank and drank until Steve finally had to tap out. Ever since then, according to the story, Steve was kicked out of the clique and Billy became the apex predator of the school. Steve was still fairly popular, but not at all like he used to be.

The only thing on Jonathan's mind was the way that Steve's face looked in the low light of the flashlight and the way strands of his undone hair fell in front of his face. Even in the dim light of the moon and the dollar store flashlight, Jonathan could tell that Steve Harrington was undeniably hot.

The only thing on Jonathan's mind that night when he fell asleep, though, was how in the hell was he going to manage to avoid him.

That morning was probably one of the worst Jonathan had ever experienced. Considering he went to bed at about five a.m., and he had to wake up at about seven, two hours of sleep did not exactly mean good news. Jonathan was royally screwed for a majority of the day. He'd be insanely lucky if he didn't pass out in any of his classes. But with that on his mind, he pulled himself out of bed, grabbed a towel, and started to head off to the shower. He stepped into the bathroom, immediately turned on the hot water, and started to strip himself of his clothes. His bruises were healing, thank god, and he could see the difference in coloration. The worst ones were a deep purple and the smaller ones were just a light blue. They still hurt, even when Jonathan hardly touched them, but that at least showed progress.

Over the past few years, Jonathan has realized that he gets his best thinking done in the shower. It was quiet in there, and a majority of

the time he was able to relax and not care about what was happening outside of the curtain. He ran his hair through the water, feeling the burning sensation trail down his back. His skin was already turning red due to the increasingly hot temperature. Another thing that Jonathan had realized was the fact that he took his showers way too hot.

Jonathan sat at the table eating breakfast with his mother and his younger brother. Will was talking about how he was excited for his birthday coming up in the next few weeks. Joyce was intently listening to his excitement and his concerns about the state of the group and how he thinks the party will go.

"They're thinking about letting this new girl join our group. Mike hates it. He hates her. I really don't know how I feel about it." Will looked everywhere but the eyes of his Mom and Jonathan, mainly staring down at his plate. "She seems nice. But if Mike doesn't agree, I feel bad we have to push her away."

"Well, Will, I don't know why you guys are keeping yourselves so secluded in the first place. Having tiny cliques like this makes everything so much harder, and there's always conflicts like this. Maybe you guys should just try to open up." Joyce said to Will as she took a sip of her black coffee, looking over to Jonathan with that motherly look that urged him to contribute to the conversation.

"Yeah, Will. Sometimes...sometimes change is hard, but it's necessary and it's healthy. You're not gonna go your whole life in the same clothes, or in the same shoes, or in the same school. There's always change and you just have to let it be. Who is this girl that they're talking about, anyway?" Jonathan ignored his plate of breakfast, that even though he cooked himself, he didn't feel like eating. He watched as Will took out a photo of Mike, Dustin and a red-haired girl.

"Her name is Maxine, but we call her Max. She has a brother. His name is Billy, I think. I see her leave school with him." Jonathan almost spit out his damn drink. All he needed was Billy Hargrove to be brought up at the breakfast table. He threw his fork on his plate and threw the plastic utensils away, furiously standing up out of his

chair. It was almost time for him to leave for school, anyway. He slammed his chair back under the table and left the kitchen in a furious stomp. He listened closely even as he left, and the silence hanging around the dining table was tense.

Jonathan stormed into his room to grab his things. He wasn't going to bring his camera today and risk it getting broken again, but he just took a roll of film to develop. He stuffed it in his messenger bag, that was now stained with blood, and slung it across his shoulder. One hand ran through his hair as the other turned off the lights in his room as he walked out of the door, ready to take off for school. No one stopped him on his way out, even when he passed his mother, who was still grabbing her keys. Will was sitting on the couch watching the last few minutes of his cartoons. That was okay, though, because Jonathan liked to be the first one in the car anyway. It let him sit and think for another unusual amount of time, because every time he was alone, that was all he did.

He sat there and thought.

Jonathan sat completely bored in his AP Chemistry class. He had a chirping Steve Harrington sitting right next to him. He didn't really know what to do- he could tell Steve's intentions were pure, but...he was just sometimes kind of annoying.

"I got the teacher to switch my seat over here." Steve said, his head going from looking at Jonathan to staring down Tommy H. "I know this guy's in the class, and I felt like if I sat over here it might make things on you a little easier." Steve tapped his hand on the desk, obviously not able to just. Sit. Still. It was the only thing that had Jonathan on his nerves. Steve was always bouncing his leg, or tapping his pencil, or talking in his ear, or just doing whatever little things he does that made Jonathan's nerves tick.

"Thanks, Steve." was all he could bring himself to say as he was lazily listening and taking notes along with his teacher's lecture. It was the same thing as last class, a review of the elements and how specific things reacted in the environment, and Jonathan could swear

he was about to pass out. At this point, he wished he could, because then he wouldn't have to deal with the boring lecture or Steve constantly asking him questions about his life or what he liked.

"So, are you still up for today after school?" Jonathan whipped his head around to look at Steve. After school? He had never agreed to anything like that. He wanted to just get out of classes and go develop his photos, but now he has to do this? Of course he does.

"Yeah..sure." He groaned as he looked back down at his notes. They were uneven, trailing off of lines... he could swear he saw a drop of drool from when he probably dozed off. He felt himself doing it again all of a sudden when...

"Jonathan!" His teacher's voice rang loud in his ears. Jonathan stuttered, mumbling out a "What?" as the rest of the class around him started to snicker.

"Can you please give me a brief summary of what I just explained?" His teacher leaned on his desk, giving him a look. Jonathan could feel his face getting hot. He pulled on his collar, like the cliché move in the movies, and he gulped. More people around him started to giggle when he started to go speechless. The tension in the room could be cut with a spoon.

"Hey, Mr. Flanagan, give the kid a break, huh! Let him have a snooze if you can't keep him up." Steve leaned back in his chair and all of a sudden, instead of red, Jonathan went white. Steve Harrington, sasssing his teacher in his name? Oh, that wouldn't do. Jonathan was already too scared to speak in the face of authority, and for Steve to disrespect it in his name scared him beyond disbelief. He looked over to Steve and started at him, shaking his head.

"Steve, lunch detention. See you there." The teacher walked back behind his desk as the bell rang in unison.

Talk about saved by the fucking bell.

As Jonathan walked out of class, Steve of course followed quickly behind him. They were also followed by someone else this time, as Jonathan felt someone's hand hold him back and whip him around. It was Tommy H., of course, with a dumb menacing look in his eye.

“Hey, baby boy. How’s your new boy toy lookin’?” He glanced over to Steve. Oh no. Tommy took his hand off of Jonathan’s shoulder and looked over to Steve, his hands clenched by his sides. “Hope you’re enjoying the nights alone together, fags.” Tommy laughed in Steve and Jonathan’s faces as he began to walk off, Carol snickering with him as she showed up in the hallway. Then, Steve did something unexpected. He walked up behind Tommy, pulled him around, and knocked him clean with a right-hook. Tommy held his face as he almost toppled over, hitting the lockers as he stumbled back. He inhaled and tried to go in on Steve, but to no avail as Steve dodged and pushed Tommy away. He stepped away from Steve and towards Carol as he mumbled more insults and slurs under his breath.

Steve looked over to Jonathan. Jonathan looked at Steve. He was speechless; he stood in a dumbfounded shock as Steve smiled and put his hand on his shoulder. Jonathan knew he was supposed to thank him, but he didn’t know how. He tried to speak, but nothing came up. He was averting eye contact with him and he didn’t know what to do. In a quick, impulse decision, he pushed Steve’s hand off of him, and muttered a quiet “Thanks.” as he walked away from him. He dared not to look back and see what Steve’s reaction was, whether he laughed or he was angry or whatever. He does hear Steve sigh, though, as he walks away and to his next class. As he reached the end of the hall, Jonathan could hear him yell a quick, “Are we still on for after school?”

Jonathan didn’t want to answer.

It’s after school and Jonathan isn’t in the library. He’s in the darkroom, developing pictures, relishing in the sweet silence. Nobody knows he’s in here, he just took a teacher’s key before the end of last class and unlocked the door. No one ever came in here, anyway, so Jonathan was pretty safe. This is probably the only place in the whole world that Jonathan knew he could be alone in. He picked up one of the photos that was hanging on the string to dry- inspecting it to know which one it was.

It was the photo he had taken of Steve earlier that morning. He looked as good in it as he remembered, if not better. His hair fell

down in strands over his face, his lips parted into a perfect smile...Jonathan felt himself blushing at the thought of this almost perfect portrait.

He looked down at his array of photos, looking through his recent ones. He sifted through them as he stopped as he saw one that he hadn't remembered taking. He looked at it, closely, until he finally realized that the subject was himself. This is why Jonathan never took photos of himself. He wasn't a good looking person. Steve must have taken the photo- who else could it have been?

Jonathan thought a little bit more about how Steve had stuck up for him today after Chemistry. Is someone that wants to betray him really going to go out of his way to punch his ex-best friend? Is someone that's gonna sabotage him going to continue to try and talk to him, even after Jonathan desperately tried to ignore him? No, he thought not. So why was Jonathan automatically pushing him away?

Jonathan felt his heart flutter for a fleeting moment as he thought again about how Steve completely right-hooked Tommy H., and maybe for a second he realized why he was pulling away. Every time he thought about Steve, he always felt a little pang in his heart and he always felt butterflies in his stomach when he thought about his smile, and the way that he always seemed to try and be at Jonathan's side.

But, Jonathan Byers couldn't love Steve Harrington. Steve was popular, handsome, and everything that Jonathan was not. Jonathan was reserved and quiet, and he stayed in the back of the classroom, never raised his hand, and never back-talked the teacher. He tried his best to stay as irrelevant as possible. Steve, on the other hand, was always doing something- whether it be talking to his friends, or wooing ladies in the hallway, or even just standing by his locker-looking somehow perfect when he wasn't even trying- Jonathan could never be that. He could never relate to that.

Was Jonathan willing to accept that risk?

Maybe he was. Maybe he wasn't.

But, he was going to have to choose the former.

At seven o'clock, Jonathan is still in the darkroom. He's waiting on the last of his stack of photos to dry, sitting in the silence and listening to music on his Walkman. He head bangs to the beat of *Should I Stay or Should I Go*, one of the most overplayed songs on his mixtape. He still admits that it's a good song, though, no matter how many times it's played over and over again in his ears.

Outside of his music, the room is silent. There is a steady drip of chemical solution from the photos he just hung up to dry, and you could hear the faintest of sounds coming from his headphones as his music played. As Jonathan gets to the good part in the song, the silence is filled with a loud rapping at the door.

Jonathan was totally wiggling out.

He took off his headphones and stopped his music- looking around the room. He stood in dumbfounded shock for a few moments, thinking the coast is clear, or maybe he was just hearing things in the background of the music. But then, another string of loud hits at the door rang through his ears and he jumped like a little girl.

As he caught his breath, he fumbled with the keys and he walked back over to the door, hoping that whoever it was was just a student and he wouldn't be in trouble for staying in the school after hours. He did kind of sneak in here, in the first place. He shakily opened the door, ready to be yelled at by some administrator, but he was suddenly met by the warm face of Nancy Wheeler.

"Jonathan! You've been worrying me sick, Jesus Christ! I'm not at school for two days, and when I go to see you, you're not at your house, and you have bruises all over your face-" Nancy stormed into the darkroom going completely mom mode. She quickly put her hands on his face, tracing over his black eye and running her thumb over the cut on the apple of his cheek. "My god, what happened?" She stormed over to the chair in the far corner of the darkroom, the one Jonathan was sitting on, but he let her have the seat anyway because she was angry as is.

"It's nothing. Thanks for asking me how school has been going, Nance." Jonathan sped over to his photos hanging from pins, examining them to make sure they were dry. He took them down anyway, not really caring, because he didn't know if he was uncomfortable with Nancy being in here with him or not. He hastily shoved the finished photos into his bag and stood uncomfortably at the table, while Nancy was staring him down.

"What happened, Jonathan. You're lying." Nancy crossed her legs at her chair, staring Jonathan dead in the eyes. Jonathan wasn't lying when he means that Nancy has never looked more intimidating in the entire time he has known her.

"It was Billy, nothing much...He got me good out in front of the buses. Some kid came and got me out of it, drove me home...It's fine." He spoke low and with not much enthusiasm.

"Who? Do you know who did?" Nancy's face went from intimidating to quizzical. She rested her head on her hand as she stared at Jonathan, waiting for him to respond.

"Some dude named...Steve, or something. I don't know. I haven't talked to him." That was a lie, Jonathan knew damn sure of it.

"Wait, Steve? As in, Steve Harrington. You're sure? You're sure you're sure?" She stood up, suddenly almost becoming very excited, almost, which confused Jonathan to an extent.

"I mean, I guess, it's not that important, I've forgotten about it,-" Jonathan rubbed the back of his neck in a state of complete teenage awkwardness. He really didn't understand why Nancy was making this such a big deal.

"You have to tell me everything. *Every* thing." She dropped her bag down to the ground as she paced around the room, worrying Jonathan to an extent.

"I said, it's nothing to go so wacko about-"

"And I said, tell me everything that happened." Nancy suddenly pushed Jonathan down onto the chair, took away his Walkman that

he was white-knuckling in his grasp, and sat and waited for him to speak.

It's close to eight thirty and Jonathan and Nancy are walking down the street, alone, in the pitch black. Jonathan doesn't say anything. Nancy doesn't say anything. They walk down the street, listening to the cicadas buzz and the crickets chirp, occasionally looking up to the stars or the orange streetlights.

It seems like a scene from a dream. Sometimes Jonathan would dream about himself, in this exact situation, except it would just be him. He'd walk down a road, sometimes with a name, and the streetlights above him would flicker on and off with no end in sight. It made Jonathan feel like there were coins in his stomach and fog in his head.

Jonathan jumps slightly as Nancy breaks the stone silence with a clearing of her throat.

"So, Jonathan... I wanted to ask you a question." She said it innocently enough, but the moment she spoke the words, Jonathan couldn't help but think about everything she could say. "Why were you looking in my window last night?" or "Why were you out so late last night?" or something even more outlandish than that- she could ask why he didn't think Steve was important- which he never wanted to imply, because he was, he did kind of save him from imminent death, but-

"You said Steve helped you out of the fight with Billy. You said you talked. Is he being...nice to you?"

Jonathan was pulled out of his racing thought process as he choked on nothing in response to the question. "Yeah-" he coughed out, covering his awkwardly flushed face. Why was he flushed? He couldn't explain it to himself, really, he didn't know why the apples of his cheeks felt red hot and he couldn't tell you why he felt butterflies in his stomach and why he felt like his bones were turning into jelly. "He's fine. I'm indifferent." That was another damn lie. He

wasn't filled with somewhat hate, like he used to be, but it was more than he was interested in him. He felt different when he thought about him. The whole night with him went by like a haze, or a fever dream, that Jonathan struggled to remember. He just knows that at least, when he thinks about last night in the woods, it brought a smile to his face.

"But is he treating you...like how he used to? Do you think he's changed?" Jonathan watched as Nancy looked down at the ground, kicking a few rocks, but then swiftly turned away from her gaze as she looked up to make eye contact with him. He didn't want her to see his red face. The whole situation right now felt like he was wading through quicksand, he was in a constant state of panic and time was moving way too slowly. He felt himself start to breathe deeply, yet quickly, and he couldn't explain why- he couldn't explain anything right now. His vision was going almost black, and he could hardly breathe.

Jonathan walked side by side with his father, Lonnie, down the same road.

"Dad," Jonathan said as he held a caterpillar in his hand he had found a few blocks behind. "Today in school, Tommy and I held hands while we went down the slide, and I accidentally swung him off. It was really funny but Tommy didn't think so. He hit my hand off and he ran away." Jonathan spoke innocently. He was obviously hurt, Tommy was his best friend. Don't best friends hold hands? That's what he saw all of the girls do. He was pretty sure Tommy and him were best friends, considering they slept over at each other's house so many times. So when he held his hands he didn't understand what the name was that Tommy called him, and he didn't understand why he ran off with a girl named Carol.

Jonathan watched his father as he slowed down his walking pace.

"Jonathan, how do you feel about girls?" Jonathan didn't know if he understood the question. Girls were okay. None really ever talked to him, they all hung out with other girls, or the cute boys like Tommy and Justin.

"They're okay. A girl in my class named Carol likes to throw papers at me." Jonathan continued to fiddle with the caterpillar, entranced while watching it wiggle around his hands.

“Well, how do you feel about boys, then?” Lonnie slowed their pace even more. The sun was starting to set, and Jonathan could feel the weak rays on his skin, lightening him up orange, but a flattering shade of almost cherry pink as his cheeks flushed, thinking about Tommy.

“Boys are nice. I think Tommy is really pretty and he’s cool.” Jonathan smiled up at his father, the spark of innocence shining in his eyes as he talked about his tiny crush, and the way that he held his hand today. But it was when his father suddenly stopped in his tracks completely and kneeled down to Jonathan’s height, leaving them in the middle of the road, off of Mirkwood.

His father’s hands on his shoulder are tight, like a viper’s grip. The look in his eyes is nothing of love, more of a cold malice, as he stared into the eyes of his son. Jonathan can see out of the corners of his eyes, his father’s hands white knuckling around his shoulder, and Jonathan was sure he’d have bruises. He felt his father’s hands let go for a moment, and Jonathan felt fine again, like he was safe, but all hope was abandoned as he felt a sharp sting to the side of his face, his head snapping back in response to the force. Lonnie stood up in his tracks and looked down at Jonathan, who now had tears flowing down his face and a hand over his cheek as it throbbed in pain.

“My son won’t be a queer. I’ve taught you so much fucking better than that.” This was almost the fourth time this week his dad had talked about this just this week.

Jonathan sniffled and continued walking.

“Jonathan? Hey, Jonathan, are you okay?”

Jonathan was standing about ten feet away from Nancy. Had she walked off without noticing him paralyzed in fear? Had he backed away? That entire memory was a shit show, and Jonathan didn’t know why this was the first time he remembered the experience. He didn’t even know it had happened, maybe his brain had shut it out, or something, or for all he knows it could have been completely made up. He was scared. Should he be concerned that he was able to admit that?

“Jonathan, you’re crying.” Nancy stepped closer to him, maybe hesitant as Jonathan watched her awkwardly step back, obviously second guessing a decision to cup his face and wipe away his tears.

Jonathan felt like he was a fish out of water. He could feel the warm tears stream down his face, and Jonathan didn’t know why he didn’t move to wipe them away. He waited as they dried before he took awareness of his surroundings- the same road the memory occurred on- Mirkwood. Was he freaked out? Yes.

After about five minutes of Jonathan going over the situation in his head, figuring out how to speak after he felt so dumbfounded and embarrassed in front of Nancy, he settled on mumbling out a weak apology.. “I’m sorry,” He said, forcing himself to pick up his heavy head and look Nancy in the eye. “I don’t know what came over me.” He fiddled with his hands, like the caterpillar in his memory was still there, and he started to walk on the road again.

“It’s okay, Jonathan. I’m sorry I pressed.” She put her arm around him, not tall enough to reach his shoulders, so opting for going around his arms. They walked like that for a little bit more before Jonathan saw the Wheeler’s house coming up on the horizon. “So, are you coming to the pep rally on Friday?”

Pep rally? That was one phrase Jonathan hasn’t heard in a while. His school wasn’t the school to have a pep rally, they weren’t really the school to do anything. It was just Hawkins High School. Nothing special about it. But pep rallies, or anything of the sort, weren’t something that Jonathan was interested in. Too many people, it’s too loud, and he’s always alone. It was never something that peaked his interest to watch skimpy cheerleaders run around as hormonal teens screamed in his ears and people goofed off ‘cause they were out of class. It never seemed exciting to him.

“Uhm... I dunno. Maybe.” Jonathan shrugged as Nancy adjusted her things before she walked up to her house. He stood in their driveway as Nancy hurriedly told him that Barb and her would hang out with him if he didn’t want to be alone, blah blah, Jonathan couldn’t focus on much after she walked in the door and Jonathan was left outside. The only thing that was on his mind currently was the memory, or so called, and Steve-fucking-Harrington.

He starts walking down the hill, and the only thing that he can focus on is why in the hell doesn't he remember his father hitting him? He remembers him calling him a queer, on occasion, and he remembered some nights that his Dad would forget to feed them on the nights their Mom was working late, and how he was just a shitty father and a shitty person. He never remembered a lot of physical injury, though.

Not to mention, the horrible response he gave to his best friend, his only friend. He knew for a fact he wasn't going to go to some pep rally, he knew that Nancy was concerned and he just pushed her away as he was crying. Who did he think he was? Did he really think that he was so full of himself that he could just push people away when he's feeling and deal with it on his own? He knew what happened when he tried to deal with it on his own. It never turned out pretty.

Jonathan's always been a terrible friend. He never let anyone in and he always gave such mixed signals. He remembered back to the time him and Tommy H. were friends when they were kids, but it took him a few more years after he yanked his hand off of Jonathan's and called him a faggot for him to realize that they weren't friends anymore, and Jonathan was a freak. And that was where the tormenting began.

He also felt like a bad person because he was still here, thinking about whether or not he should trust Steve. God damn it, he had pulled Jonathan out of a bloody fight with the biggest douche in their year, and he couldn't even bring himself to believe that maybe he actually cared about him? But no one ever cared about Jonathan—they all ended up leaving him in the long run, because they either get new friends or they finally just realize how much of a bad person he is. Why do you think he's alone in his junior year? He's a loner, and at this point he's learned not to let anyone in his secluded walls. That's what works the best.

As Jonathan continued to walk home, he remembered what Nancy had asked him. Steve was a nice person, don't get him wrong, but not every part of him was ready to trust him. He might be easily and somehow, effortlessly, handsome, and somehow he wanted to talk to Jonathan Byers? Outlandish.

But wait, Steve was not just talking to Jonathan to try and seduce him. Steve wasn't talking to him at *all* for that reason, and Jonathan knew that for a fact. He had only ever seen Steve with girls, and, nonetheless, Jonathan couldn't even be sure about his sexuality. But maybe he needs to take into consideration the way he feels every time he's around Steve Harrington. His bones feel fuzzy, and his head feels like it's full of a pink and red fog, and his stomach flutters. No girl had ever made him feel this way. He didn't know of anyone in Hawkins, Indiana, that could make him feel this way other than Steve.

Why did Jonathan think that Steve would even go for him, anyway? Jonathan wasn't special, he wasn't popular- he had just got his ass handed to him in the middle of the school. He had terrible bruises that still hurt to prove just how weak he truly was. There was no way in hell that Steve Harrington was thinking about Jonathan Byers the same way he was thinking of him. He'd see him again tomorrow and Steve wouldn't talk to him, like it used to always go, and Jonathan was okay with being in the background. Would it be any different to be *someone*?

It was as he walked up to his front door did he think, that maybe, it would be worth a try.

It was close to midnight as Jonathan sat on his bed, looking through the finished and clear photos he developed. One is of the sunrise, the morning after he had gotten the camera. Another was of the horizon of the woods, as he sat upon a tower near the edge of the wood for a few hours past midnight a few days after the sunrise photo.

Then, he stumbled upon a photo of himself. He didn't know how to feel about it. You could see his hollow, lifeless cheekbones, which made him look like a witch. His skin was pale, and looked even worse in the lighting of this photo, and he looked two nights dead-like an open casket funeral. He had no expression, just maybe the slightest of space between his lips and his brows furrowed. You could see the edges of his torn jacket and a red shirt. This was one of the photos Steve must have taken the night before.

Jonathan didn't want to look at himself anymore. The picture itself wasn't anything special, and the portrait could have been of someone so much better, someone that actually deserved to have their photo and their face reserved for years to come. Jonathan was not one of those people, and he didn't have one of those faces. He watched with no remorse as his hands began to tear the picture. It fell to the floor in a handful of small pieces, leaving Jonathan with no satisfaction, but more a feeling of numbness in his body.

He sorts through the rest of the stack. There's nothing special about the photos he took. They're all of nature, which is what Jonathan always photographs, because he was unoriginal. He had, though, one photo of Will, in his wizard costume before his friends came over to play Dungeons and Dragons. He set it aside, intentions on giving it to his mother, or maybe hanging it on the fridge for Will to be embarrassed about in the morning.

As Jonathan set down the stack of photos and stuffed them under his bed, he heard a light tap on his window. He almost didn't notice it, it was so quiet. But he didn't know whether to be concerned or not, it could have easily been a tree branch or something of the sort. But he knew it couldn't have been when he heard a louder, more like a bang on his window. He quickly shot up out of his bed, eager to see what the cause of the sound was.

He opened his window right as another rock came barreling towards his window, by the one and only Steve Harrington.

"Oh my god!" Jonathan could hear Steve yell from below as he held his cheek, feeling it throb from the force of the rock hitting him square on the same place Billy hit with his ring. "I'm so fucking sorry!" Steve yelled again, Jonathan listening to him being audibly flustered. "I was just trying to get your attention-"

"It's okay, Steve." Jonathan yelled back, feeling a small smile creep onto his lips as he laughed. He closed his window as he walked down to the front door, stepping out to meet Steve at the side of the house.

"That's a good look on you, yanno." Steve smiled at him as he put his hand down from cupping his cheek.

“What do you mean?” Jonathan said as he started to walk out of the driveway, assuming that Steve was dragging him out to do something. He was confident enough in that assumption.

“You smiled, up at you window. You looked good. Why don’t you smile more often?” Steve followed Jonathan off of the property. “Hey, I’m the one leading this. You don’t know where I’m taking you.” Steve was right. Why was Jonathan the one in front? Another reason why Jonathan doesn’t get too confident in himself.

Jonathan also didn’t know how to react to Steve’s earlier comment. Jonathan didn’t like the way that he looked when he smiled, and he never had much to smile about, so he didn’t do it a lot. It wasn’t ever something he thought people picked up on.

Jonathan followed after Steve in a cold silence. Steve maybe picked up on this after he asked Jonathan, “So, not much to talk about?”

“I’m not a very talkative person.” This, for once, was a truth.

“I can tell. You completely ignored me in school today.” Steve looked over at Jonathan and laughed a bit as he led them out of the street and onto the roads in Hawkins that Jonathan wasn’t completely familiar with. “You also ditched me in the library. I thought we were on, man.”

Fuck. Jonathan had completely forgot he was supposed to meet Steve in the library to tutor him.

This is why people weren’t friends with Jonathan. He forgot, or didn’t care enough to remember, and he always made people angry at him. He did it enough until people stopped caring about him. And now he feels so bad, and fucking terrified, that Steve is going to think he doesn’t care. Because don’t get him wrong, Jonathan really fucking cares.

“I’m sorry. I completely forgot- I- I don’t know how to make it up t-to-to you though.” Jonathan was stumbling over his words like a mad man and he didn’t understand how his body was feeling right now. Steve looked back at him, and stopped walking for a second. As Steve looked in his eyes, he was scared that he could see Jonathan’s flushed

cheeks in the dim glow of the orange streetlights.

“As long as you enjoy what we’re going to do tonight, and you meet me tomorrow in the library, it’s officially made up in my book.” Steve chuckled a little bit as they continued to walk, Jonathan at a slow pace next to him. It was a quiet night, not a lot of crickets or insects they usually heard, and the moon was full overhead. It was a beautiful night, and as Jonathan looked over to Steve, he saw how pretty he looked in the bad orange lighting. Jonathan didn’t know how he did it, because he’s never met anyone that looked good in the overhead lights, but here was Steve Harrington standing in front of him looking somehow even better.

Jonathan looked away as he felt the familiar feeling of wading through quicksand come over him again as they ended up on Mirkwood.

After another ten minutes of careless walking and careless conversation, they ended up somewhere that Jonathan had only been a few times. It was the quarry, and Steve was sitting on the edge, his legs kicking over the cliff. Jonathan sat down next to him, but not too close. He wasn’t creepy.

“Yanno, Jonathan,” Steve said with a sigh as he looked over to Jonathan, “You’re good company. You listen, and you at least try to respond. We’re gonna get you better at that. Just like how we’re gonna get you better at smiling.” Steve laughed as he placed a hand to brace himself on the ground, desperately close to Jonathan’s. Jonathan looked to the other side of the cliff as he felt that same feeling of his bones turning into jelly as he imagined Steve’s hand on his, instead, and he quickly erased the thought from his mind before he could dwell on it anymore.

“Yanno, Steve,” Jonathan mimicked Steve’s same sigh as he thought of something to say. “Why are you hanging out with me? I thought you hated me last year. You threw spitballs at me. You were friends with Tommy. You know what he says about me, you know what they all say about me.” Jonathan felt himself start to ramble, and he looked off to the side so he wouldn’t risk eye contact with Steve. “I’m the queer, the *faggot*, you know that, right? They see you with me,

they're gonna think you're one too."

"You're not actually a faggot, Jonathan. Don't make their words make you think that kinda stuff about yourself. They don't mean shit." Steve chuckled as Jonathan's cheeks suddenly went very red and he moved his hand away from where his and Steve's were way too close.

"That's funny, Steve. You're the person who's spent more time with me than anyone else besides Nancy in the past year or so. Thought you'd catch on." Jonathan wondered how he would react. Jonathan wasn't saying he was fully gay, but he is just saying that girls never peaked his interests.

"Wait, what? Fuck, Jonathan-" Steve suddenly also went red, as Jonathan watched his stutter and stumble. He couldn't lie, it was kind of funny. "I didn't know. I'm sorry. I'm not against gays or anything like that, no, I won't lie, I've always looked at guys a bit differently too, but-" Jonathan's eyes widened as he heard Steve's confession. Steve stopped dead in his tracks, and it seems like he realized what he had said himself. "Fuck. I just outed myself to you, didn't I?" Steve burst out laughing suddenly, and Jonathan couldn't help but chuckle a little bit too.

"Yeah, I guess you did." He said with a smile on his face. Steve looked at him and pointed, saying something in between his bouts of laughter about Jonathan smiling.

Jonathan knew that he felt that same feeling, the one where it felt like there were butterflies in his stomach, and a haze of red and pink fog in his head, but right now he didn't want the feeling to end. Steve Harrington just told him that he's bi, at least, and they were laughing together, and Jonathan for once was smiling. He was happy.

He definitely wanted to feel more of this.

Notes for the Chapter:

okay!!!! yay!!!! i did it!!! i was really proud of this chapter honestly! stay tuned for more and remember to leave a kudos/comment because that helps me

write faster and u guys can get chapters quicker <3
hit me up on social media, too
tumblr- lillianthekidd
insta- wasthedarkness

3. All I Need

Summary for the Chapter:

Steve has to come to accept that he's falling in love.

Notes for the Chapter:

sorry this took me wayyy too long! its in the middle of testing season where i am and i've been working on school grades for the past two weeks. i hope yall are happy to hear that i've worked my F in geometry up to a mid D.

During their walk home, Steve Harrington had come to realize a few things that he had done right and wrong during his and Jonathan's endeavor.

First things first, he walked from his house, all the way to Jonathan's, to the quarry. He had a car- why didn't he use it? Maybe it was just the fact that Steve was way too excited to use the cliché of throwing rocks at your crushes window to remember to bring his car. Not that Steve was saying that Jonathan was his crush. In no way was he saying that.

Second, the fact that he completely outed himself to Jonathan. That really wasn't even the part he felt bad about, either- it was the part where Steve had put up his popular boy persona that he had thought he had ditched and made it out like being gay was a bad thing. And not to mention that he probably made Jonathan really, really uncomfortable when he said what he did. But now, one good thing did come out of it, which was the fact that Jonathan was gay.

Not that he cares. Because he doesn't. He really does not care one single bit, and as he explains this all out to himself in his head, he scoffs and kicks a rock across the road. Who was he kidding? Of course he cared.

He cared because now that Jonathan knew that Steve was bi, he had great material to blackmail him with if he ever saw the need to. But

he assumes that means that Steve has material to blackmail him with, too?

Everything in his head is so jumbled right now because he's in the middle of walking Jonathan home, and he can't get over how nice he looks in the streetlights. For some reason, his torn up clothes and his shaggy hair was attractive, and Steve really wishes he had that much confidence to not care about his appearance. As Steve kept up casual conversation, his thoughts continued in his mind, and when he saw Jonathan smile after a stupid joke he made, Steve can't help but smile too.

Steve did care a little bit.

They got to Jonathan's house about quarter after three. They stood in an awkward silence as they came closer to the driveway, and Steve was very, very conflicted about what he was about to do.

You see, everyone sees Steve as this big, popular jock, who's on the swim team and can get any lady he wants- and any dude he wants, too,- and nothing can touch him. Even after getting beaten out by Billy, people still had respect for him, because unlike Billy, he was an actually somewhat nice person. He stuck to his word, had massive amounts of charm, and to the outside world, a seemingly overflowing bucket of confidence.

But when it came to Jonathan Byers, Steve Harrington was a bumbling mess.

"So, Jonathan..." He shrugged, slowing their pace down as he stuffed his hands in his pockets. He was doing a somewhat good job at keeping his cool even as his brain was buzzing with flurries of emotions. If he was blushing, he really wished Jonathan didn't see it

in the dim light of the moon.

“Steve?” Jonathan responded somewhat apprehensively, stopping along with him as Steve looked at everything other than Jonathan’s eyes.

What he really wanted to say was something along the lines of “Wow, did you know that even in orange you look amazing?” or “Your eyes look so fucking beautiful and I kind of want to kiss you right now-”

Wait, what?

“Are you still okay with meeting me in the library tomorrow after school?” Yeah, that sounded a bit more level-headed. He continued a smooth pace as he tried his best to ‘act cool’. Steve Harrington wasn’t nervous, or crushing on a guy that he’s only really known for two days, or was he going to let anybody think that he was one shred of weak.

Because showing emotions was weak.

“Yeah, Yeah, that sounds okay.” Jonathan said as he stuffed his hands in his own pockets, turning away as he yawned.

“Okay, dude. Go get some rest, because I have math to learn tomorrow.” Steve chuckled as he put his hand on Jonathan’s shoulder, pulling Jonathan a little bit closer. They had enough room for the Holy Ghost, at least. “And also, you have my number if you need anything? Right?” Steve looked down at Jonathan with his signature charm- hoping that the shit he pulls on the ladies will work with guys too. He’s never really tried.

But why is he even *trying* when Steve Harrington knows he doesn’t have a crush on Jonathan Byers. No way, no how. Not ever.

“Yeah, Steve.” Jonathan pulled away from under Steve’s grasp on his shoulder as he waved goodbye to him, walking in the front door of his house.

God damn it.

Steve was never a fan of walking alone. Period. And he really did get

himself into some deep shit when he decided to walk to Jonathan's, alright. It was forty-five minute hike across town, and if the way there was torture enough, then the way back was hell on Earth.

He spent his time singing to himself and stuffing his hands in his pockets over and over until he got them positioned perfectly right on the first try. That was pretty much it.

Other than that, he spent his time walking aimlessly and thinking. He didn't have anywhere specific to go and nowhere to be at a specific time- his parents weren't at home, nor were they ever. They were out on some business trip that Steve didn't want to go to and wasn't invited to go to. Did he care? No, he didn't, because Steve Harrington doesn't care about his parents, just like every other teenager living in the moment. And that's what he is, a teenager that doesn't give a shit about anything, and never will. He knew that any shred of emotion or concern made him weak, and he wasn't weak.

But sometimes he will admit that it did kind of hurt to come home to an empty house. No note, no nothing. It happened a lot more often than you would think.

Given this opportunity to spend time alone with his thoughts, he found himself thinking about Jonathan. Not even for the first time tonight. Even though signs of emotions were weak, Steve was kind of okay with that. Jonathan was worth it. Maybe one day he'd accept the fact that Jonathan was better than just a friend. Maybe a best friend.

It had never been hard for Steve to accept himself. He has had girlfriends in the past, yeah, whatever, but when he met his first guy "crush", he knew that he was at least somewhat gay. And he kept that to himself. No one knew except for him. And now, Jonathan Byers. And damn, when he looked at him? Maybe he was really just gay, because Jonathan puts every woman he has ever been with to shame.

He first noticed that he was attractive when he had him in the backseat of his car, driving to his house to drop him off after their fight. Don't ask him why he knew his address- it was a plan that him and his buddies never followed through with back in his days of

tormenting.

As he was trying to get an almost unconscious, bloody Jonathan Byers into his room and onto his bed, Jonathan had made a few noises. And they weren't inherently sexual, or anything, and Steve would *never* even think about doing anything like that, but he couldn't help but almost stop in his tracks when Jonathan clenched onto Steve's shirt while he was dragging him into his room. His grip was accompanied by a moan, probably in pain, but that didn't mean that Steve wasn't still completely shell shocked. He then quickly dropped Jonathan off in his bed, taking a few moments to scribble down a note on some paper he had on his desk, and he bolted.

And then it was later that night, where Jonathan stood in the light of their crappy dollar-store flashlights, did Steve see Jonathan's eyes like a mix of honey and hazel- it was unimaginable. Steve didn't understand how all of the girls in their school didn't see what he saw, didn't see that damn near perfect face that Steve saw. And not to mention a quiet, soft and shy personality that he thought was completely endearing, and he couldn't get enough of it.

But Steve didn't have a crush on him. Of course he didn't.

Steve woke up to the light of day shining way too bright in his eyes. He groaned, turning over to his side to set eyes on his alarm clock.

It was 10:37. School started four hours ago. *Fuck.*

Steve bolted out of bed, grabbing a t-shirt and a pair of jeans as he ran into the bathroom, shuffling them on as he stuck a toothbrush in

his mouth.

“Fuck, fuck, fuck, fuck, shit-” He mumbled through his toothbrush as he pulled the shirt on over his head, looking at himself in the mirror. His hair was a mess, and there was a stain on his shirt, but right now he didn’t care. He pulled on his pants the rest of the way and slipped a belt on, maybe missing a few belt loops along the way. He frantically put some toothpaste on his toothbrush as he started brushing with one hand and trying to style his hair with the other, eventually giving up and holding the toothbrush in his mouth as he brushed his hair back and smoothed some gel through it. He spit out the toothbrush and the excess paste, not bothering to rinse out his mouth, continuing to run through his house to grab his bag, keys and his shoes at the front door. He shoved them on as fast as he could as he ran out of the house. He jumped in his car, revved the engine, and checked the clock. 10:48. Fuck yeah.

He sped out of the driveway and was already going at least ten over the speed limit by the time he was out of his street. The drive from the house to school was already fifteen minutes, but he knew he could cut it down to nine or ten if he really tried. And he was really trying. For all he knew, Jonathan could think he stood him up at school today, and Steve couldn’t have that. Have Jonathan be disappointed in Steve? Major no-no. The only god damn reason Steve was in his car right now was because he was still very set on staying after school with Jonathan- not just to look at his pretty face, but also because he was failing Algebra II.

Steve pressed the radio on as he slammed his brakes at a red light. *Rock You Like a Hurricane* started blasting way too loud in his car, but he was fine with it. Steve tapped on his steering wheel with the drums, singing along with his window down. As the chorus came, bursting through his car, he sped down the street as the light turned green. He felt like a badass dude in a movie, with his badass entrance and badass car, like a Camaro.

It was 11 on the dot when Steve strolled into the front office. He said he had “car troubles” for his reason for being late, and he walked into Chemistry class with a bravado, causing the teacher to stop talking as Steve sat down next to Jonathan.

“What’s up, Byers?” Steve said as he pulled a stick of gum out of his bag, trying to act like he wasn’t thirty minutes awake and didn’t just spend the last ten minutes speeding through maybe two red lights and screaming along the Scorpions on the radio.

“Nothing. You missed a pop quiz.” Jonathan said nonchalantly, not looking Steve in the eye. Did he say something?

“Did I say something?” Steve chuckled, offering Jonathan a stick of gum by holding it out to him. Jonathan took it from him as he continued looking down at the table. He didn’t seem like he was in the mood for conversation. Had he missed something other than a pop quiz? He looked around the room, locking eyes with Tommy in the back of the classroom. Tommy was laughing at something one of his buddies as he sat there, smacking his gum, leaning back in his chair. He made a small gesture that Steve didn’t care to see again and Steve turned back around, now a lot less upbeat. For all he knew, Tommy was probably saying shit to Jonathan while Steve wasn’t here.

What had they been saying to Jonathan before he was sitting here? Very quickly, Steve was filled with an awkward amount of unease.

“What happened? Did Tommy say something?” Steve looked over to Jonathan, who had his back hunched and head down staring at the table. He shrugged, and Steve sighed as he leaned back in his own seat. He knew Jonathan was lying. Tommy always had to start problems. Ever since he’s known him, he’s always been the one to stir the pot.

Their teacher took a chunk out of their time in class to talk about science fair projects. Steve tuned him out a majority of the time, but was quickly brought back to reality as Jonathan turned around in his seat to face him. It was the first time Jonathan had ever made a gesture in school to openly induce conversation. If that wasn’t a step in the right direction, then what was?

“So,” Jonathan said, crossing his legs. “Do you want to pair up for the science fair project?” Steve watched as Jonathan’s hands fiddled in his lap, his eyes meeting everywhere else but Steve’s.

“Dude,” He laughed, putting his hand on Jonathan’s knee. “Are you actually *excited* for the science fair?” Steve’s never known anyone excited to do anything science related- but he’s also never been friends with the educated type.

“Uh, yeah. Kinda. But should I not be excited for it? Cause if I shouldn’t- I’m not-” Jonathan began stumbling over his words, and Steve watched as his face went red. Jonathan’s legs shifted so Steve’s hand was no longer on them, and Steve put it back into his lap. Damn.

Either way, Steve chuckled at Jonathan’s eager to please. Was it that? Or was Steve getting the complete wrong signals. He didn’t know, but whatever it was, it was cute.

“If you’re excited, be excited. It’s cool that you actually like it.” Steve ran a hand through his hair as he kept eye contact with Jonathan, and he watched as Jonathan’s expression went from flushed to annoyed.

“Okay, Harrington.” Jonathan scoffed, going back to his hunched position over the table.

Was it something he said?

They walked out of science class maybe a bit too close for comfort for the rest of the school. Tommy walked out and once again, made a point to yell at Steve, calling him a fag instead of Jonathan this time. He could see the bruise that he sported, the one Steve had given him yesterday. It was funny when Tommy tried to stand up to Steve, because he was a good three or four inches shorter and just smaller in

general. And he felt like it was now his duty to stand up for Jonathan, too, because didn't he say one the night they first talked that he was his bodyguard now?

Steve was at his locker, grabbing his Algebra textbook as he watched Jonathan sneak off into a part of the school that hardly anyone went to. Did he skip the class he's already failing and follow Jonathan, or sit in a class he hated just to sleep and not pay attention? He chose the former without a minute's hesitation.

Steve followed closely behind as he peeked around a corner. Jonathan had a key in his hand that he was using to unlock a door. A door to a room that Steve didn't even know that the school had. He could see from a small glimpse as the door opened to let Jonathan in that the lights were tinted red. It was almost like some weird hooker lounge lighting in the middle of the school.

Weird.

Steve listened to the bell to last block ring as he surveyed the empty halls. He walked over to the door, looking at the sign next to it. It was a darkroom, so obviously Jonathan was probably going in there to develop some pictures. He always drags that camera around with him wherever he goes, so he probably has new photos every single day. Getting to skip a class every day to chill out alone in a darkroom seems pretty damn cool, but it does also seem lonely. So Steve is just about to knock on the door before he hears a noise coming from the other side of the door.

It was quiet, and Steve was surprised that he caught it. But it sounded like a whimper, or a cry. Steve didn't like the sound of it but he didn't know whether he'd be intruding on something and he didn't know if Jonathan would get angry at him or-

Who was he kidding? He cared enough about him that his adrenaline was kicking in, and he felt his heart beat out of his chest when he imagined Jonathan in this room, alone and crying. It broke his heart.

Steve knocked on the door and he heard Jonathan falter in the middle of a sob. It took a few moments where Steve's leg was bouncing uncontrollably and his hands were shaking next to his sides

before he heard footsteps near the door, and Steve had to calm himself down before he heard the door handle shaking.

Jonathan opened the door with red, puffy eyes. His eyes widened as he saw Steve, and he tried to close the door as he turned away, most likely in shame or embarrassment. Steve caught the door, thankfully, and he walked in and ushered Jonathan back as he closed it behind them. Steve didn't know what to say in the moments that they stood in an awkward silence. Steve was standing very close to Jonathan, obviously not enough room for the Holy Ghost, and Jonathan was looking down at his feet, refusing to make eye contact with him.

"What happened?" Steve said, after standing still for far too long. He looked down at the top of Jonathan's head, placing his hand on his shoulder as he led them over to the chairs in the corner of the room, Jonathan following with no hesitation. They sat down, and Jonathan still continued to look down at the floor, refusing to make eye contact in what Steve could only conclude as Jonathan being scared to cry in front of him. He could see Jonathan shaking, and he watched as his hand continuously reached up to his face. Steve didn't know what to do, as he was overcome with emotions as he heard Jonathan sniffle.

"Nothing happened." He said, after staying quiet, and Steve's head piped up as Jonathan made eye contact with him. Steve's heart broke even more once again as he saw Jonathan's state. His eyes were obviously holding back tears, red and puffy like he had been crying for hours. His cheeks were bright red and he watched as Jonathan moved his hand up to cover his face. Steve stopped his hand before he covered his eyes and brought his hand back down, in an attempt to symbolize that he was safe. Steve wanted him to feel okay.

"No, something obviously happened. Please tell me, Jonathan. I want to- I want to make sure you're okay." Steve moved his hand up to Jonathan's face, resting over the one that Jonathan was using to wipe away his tears as they fell. He held his hand, moving it down below them into Steve's lap and he held it tight and watched as Jonathan let a single tear slip down his face.

"I just- It's just that..." Jonathan stumbled as he used the other hand that wasn't in Steve's grasp to run his hand through his hair. Steve felt as Jonathan clutched his hand, Steve's heart fluttering at the

feeling. He watched as Jonathan struggled for words, his leg starting to bounce in an obvious state on anxiousness. "Nothing...happened. I just-" Steve watched as tears began to freely spill out of Jonathan's eyes, and he let out a muffled cry, and Steve automatically started to wipe his tears away with his jacket sleeve.

"Please don't cry, Byers. I hate seeing you like this. Please, please don't cry." Steve was on the brink of crying now, too. He felt tears sting at the corners of his eyes as his face burned hot. He hated seeing Jonathan like this. Even in the days where he would throw spitballs at him (only because Tommy made him) he hated watching Jonathan walk away with not one person by his side to comfort him. As Steve tried his best to hold back his own cries, one hand was holding Jonathan's. His other held Jonathan's face as his tears began to subside.

"I feel...bad." Jonathan began to say. His voice was raspy, more than it usually was, and Steve felt like it was inappropriate in this moment to say that it sounded hot. Because it did. He watched as Jonathan dropped his head down to look at his feet, the red glow of the darkroom lighting in his hollow cheekbones. "People are calling you names now. They're gonna start beating you up, just like they do to me. Next thing you'll know you'll be the one getting your ass handed to you by Billy." Steve grasped Jonathan's hand where he held it, trying to hold back his own tears once again. There was something about seeing Jonathan in front of him, so vulnerable, so helpless, that lighted a fire under his ass to make sure that this never happened again. "I don't want that to happen to you. If one of us is gonna get hurt, I'd rather it be me." Jonathan finished, drying his tears from his cheeks, and looking up at Steve.

Steve was almost absolutely appalled. He understood that Jonathan had already dealt with the tormenting, the bullying, and the pain- but the whole reason that Steve began talking to him in the first place was so he could help protect him. And for Jonathan to say that he was okay with being the one that got hurt broke his heart.

"What do you mean, you'd rather it be you?" Steve demanded, his tone going from soft and gentle to slightly harsher. He furrowed his brows and watched as Jonathan started to stumble again.

“I mean- I’m-” He started, looking down at his feet once again. Steve let go of one of Jonathan’s hands to lift up his chin, softly, so that Jonathan was looking at him again.

The situation felt weird. Romantic, almost.

“I mean that I’ve already been beaten up. People expect me to sit back and take it. I’m the fag at this school. I don’t want you to deal with what I go through. You deserve more than that.”

“You think you *deserve* to be beaten up, Jonathan?”

Steve’s heart broke as Jonathan looked from him, Steve’s hand falling from his chin as he held Jonathan’s hands once more. He squeezed them tight as he felt tears creep up on him, and he felt a single stray one drip down his face.

“Look, Jonathan. If Billy knocks me black and blue, even if I forget my own name, know it that I am always going to protect you. Okay, Jonny?” Steve told him a quiet, gentle voice, and he leaned in closer to Jonathan. “For as long as we are friends, I don’t care what other people call me. As long as I am here to protect you, you don’t need to worry about me. I can take care of myself. And, while I do that, I’m taking care of you, you got that?” He watched as Jonathan slowly nodded. Steve brought down his hand from Jonathan’s face, and extended it to him to help him stand up from the chair. As they stood, he enclosed Jonathan in a tight hug. Jonathan quickly wrapped his arms around Steve’s torso as Steve wrapped his around Jonathan. He buried his face in Jonathan’s hair and Jonathan’s face was in the crook of his neck, and it was calm. Steve could feel as Jonathan shook as tears started to pour from his eyes again, and Steve ran his hands on Jonathan’s back and he pressed a light kiss, so small that hopefully Jonathan wouldn’t even notice, to the top of his head. Even though he hoped it had gone unnoticed, after the kiss, he felt Jonathan’s tears start to subside.

“I’ve got you, Jonathan. Don’t forget that. Please.” Steve held onto Jonathan, his grip around him not faltering.

“Okay.” He heard Jonathan say, as they began to sway in each other’s embrace in the darkroom. They stood in silence, the glow in the darkroom lighting them in their embrace. It was calm. And it was the

most peaceful Steve had probably ever felt in his life. It was quiet until the bell to go home rang throughout the school, startling both of them, given as Jonathan jumped and bumped his head up into Steve's chin.

"Ow, Byers! What did you do that for?" Steve laughed as he held his jaw, watching Jonathan's face go from scared to light-hearted as he started to chuckle too.

They released their embrace, Steve looking down at Jonathan with an air of peace. They hadn't spoken a word during that whole time, and now Steve wasn't sure what to do.

"Do you really want to tutor me right now?" Steve chuckled, walking to grab his bag from the floor in front of the door.

"Not really, no." Jonathan laughed along with Steve too, adjusting his bag on his shoulders. They opened the door to the darkroom and the hallways were already bare, children probably running around the parking lot, goofing off after school ended. They walked almost attached at the hip in the hallway and separated when they got outside. Steve was running a hand through his hair and Jonathan was fiddling with the strap of his bag as to not show any signs of suspicion.

"Do you want to go to my house?" Steve offered, gesturing in the direction of his car.

"Sure, I guess. If you're okay with it." Jonathan shrugged, walking behind Steve in a similar step.

"Great! We're gonna get fat on pizza and watch horror movies, how does that sound?" Steve said as they approached his car, the same beat up BMW M535i. Jonathan laughed as he stepped into the passenger seat, and Steve into the driver's.

"It's September." Jonathan chuckled, even though Steve could tell he was on edge as he watched him look out the passenger seat window to see all of their classmates watching them leave school together. Steve revved the engine as he looked around, watching people whisper behind their hands and whatnot, and grabbed a cigarette out

of the glovebox in front of Jonathan.

“Yeah, it’s September twenty-nine. It’s almost October. Which means it’s almost Halloween.” He took a deep drag of his cigarette before beginning to speed off and out of the school lot, already going ten over the speed limit. He had a problem with speeding.

“Yeah, sure, Harrington. Turn on the radio, would you?” Jonathan asked as he rolled down his window, sticking his hand out in the breeze of the fast-moving car. Steve happily obliged and clicked it on, turning the volume up on whatever station it was already on. Jonathan fiddled with the tuner, until he stumbled upon some random station he had never taken the time to listen to before.

Steve was so happy to look over and see a smile on Jonathan’s face as listened to the song that was playing, *Life on Mars?* by Bowie and he won’t lie, it was probably the happiest he’s felt in a long time.

They pulled into Steve’s house within fifteen minutes, and when they got out of the car, Steve had pretty much erased all memory of the past two hour’s experiences from his head. Not because he didn’t care about them, or the insane emotional bonding him and Jonathan just went through, it was more like he wasn’t about to let his feelings overcome him in this awesome night that they were totally going to spend partying.

This was the first time in almost years that Steve has let himself feel emotions publicly. He couldn’t remember the last time he cried in front of anyone since he was a little kid. His father always told him that it wasn’t manly to cry- real men had to suck it up. Real men also didn’t kiss their friend’s foreheads while they were crying in their arms, though, so maybe he was exempt from the “real men” stigma. And if feeling like this around Jonathan was wrong, he didn’t want to be a “real man” anyway.

They walked into Steve’s house, which was fairly nice for their town. He didn’t always like to just come out and say that he was rich- he always just said that they were “financially comfortable” because that’s how his mom taught him to stay humble. You know, back

when his mom cared and wasn't a complete wreck.

But that wasn't what Steve was focusing on right now.

Right now, he was focused on watching Jonathan's face light up as he looked around Steve's house- and it was a sight for sore eyes. His eyes had almost legitimate sparks in them, and his jaw was slightly agape. It was kind of cute. Kind of endearing.

"What are you, filthy rich?" Jonathan said, placing his bag down on the couch. Steve chuckled as he brushed a strand of hair behind his ear, gesturing for Jonathan to follow him as he began to walk up the steps to his room.

"I'm not *super* rich." He mumbled, "I'm financially comfortable." He stomped up the steps and he listened to Jonathan scoff playfully behind him.

"Your house is almost like a mansion. You're filthy rich, whether you admit it or not." Jonathan laughed, and Steve assumed that he probably looked cute as all get out. But right now, he wasn't caring about his totally not-crush on Jonathan. Because it was totally okay for dudes to call other guys cute, right?

Steve stopped at the start of the upstairs hallway, swinging a sharp right as he ran down to the door of his room. Jonathan followed closely behind, and Steve watched (and swooned) as he watched his fringe swoop in the air as he ran behind Steve. He opened the door, only to hear Jonathan scoff once more, and then start laughing.

"You have a TV in your room. You're not allowed to say you're just 'financially comfortable.'" Jonathan pointed at the foot of Steve's bed where there was a small television.

"You don't have a TV in yours?" He asked, one brow raised in a pseudo ignorance.

"That sounded so pretentious." Jonathan laughed, playfully punching Steve's shoulder as Steve started laughing alongside him.

"Okay, make yourself at home. I'm going downstairs to order pizza. You can sift through my desk under the TV to pick out some movies,

okay?” Steve asked, and waited before Jonathan nodded in agreement and whispered a small “okay.” to go downstairs. He gave a thumbs up in conformation and bolted downstairs to the phone, his hair falling in his face as he almost tripped going down the steps. He didn’t know why he was going so quick, but maybe it was because he was desperate to get back to Jonathan.

He dialed the number to the pizza place down the street speedily, speaking so fast he didn’t even know if the worker had heard him correctly. He really didn’t care, though, because he wanted to go back upstairs to be with Jonathan, and in no way did that mean romantically.

Is that what falling in love was like?

If it was, Steve didn’t want to admit that he was. It was just the way that Jonathan made him feel when they were around eachother did he think that maybe he was starting to feel a little bit closer to him, in a more-than-friends type of way. And with the ordeal that happened just a few hours earlier, he felt closer to him than he’s ever felt to any girl he’s been with. So yeah, maybe this was falling in love.

He hung up the phone after the worker said that his order was confirmed, and he ran up the steps just as fast as he ran down them. This time, he didn’t trip. He slowed down his pace and brushed himself off before he walked into his room to see Jonathan laying stomach down on the bed, his feet in the air as he had three movies in front of him. He obviously didn’t notice Steve had walked in, because when Steve said “Hey.” Jonathan jumped and frantically changed his position to sitting on the edge of the bed.

“Don’t stop on my account.” Steve chuckled as he sat on the bed next to Jonathan, looking at his movie selections. He had *The Shining*, *Poltergeist*, and *Friday the 13th* laid out in front of them. Damn, he had good taste. “I say The Shining, you?” Steve said as he grabbed the movie, and Jonathan nodded in agreement. Steve wanted to ask him what was up, if something *was* up, because Jonathan hadn’t spoken more than one word since they has come up to Steve’s room. Maybe he just felt uncomfortable. That’s okay, because Steve would probably feel the same way too.

He put the movie into the VHS box and walked over to the wall to turn off the light. He heard Jonathan emit a small gasp as he turned it off, and it prompted him to automatically flick it back on. "Did it startle you?" Steve chuckled, looking over to Jonathan for his response. Steve could see that in the dim light of his room, and the orange glow from the sunset outside, that Jonathan was red. And it was honestly one of the greatest sights he's ever seen. The New York skyline couldn't beat it, and neither could a California beach. Somehow, it was like all of the world's potential beauty was stored inside of Jonathan Byers, and he had it all to himself in his room right now.

"No, it's fine. You can turn it off. And the lamp by the bed, too, if that's okay." Jonathan whispered. Steve didn't know why he was whispering, but maybe that was because the movie was starting. So, he obediently flicked off the light switch once more and turned off the lamp as he sat down on the bed. He laid down, like Jonathan was, and he made sure to give them plenty of space between each other. Steve didn't want to feel predatory or anything- he didn't want to scare Jonathan off.

But when halfway through the movie, Jonathan laid his head down on Steve's shoulder and drifted off to sleep, Steve knew that it was okay. He was okay.

He was in his filthy rich house, with a beautiful boy. And he knew that he was definitely falling in love.

Notes for the Chapter:

hope you liked it! remember to follow me on social media <3

tumblr- lillianthekidd
insta- @wasthedarkness

4. Know You All Over Again

Summary for the Chapter:

Jonathan finds out some things about Steve's life at home.

Notes for the Chapter:

WOO im so sorry this chapter took so long!!! for those of you who don't follow my tumblr (which, you really should, i post all my updates there) i was in tampa for a week and couldn't get to a computer- and so ever since i got home on sunday i've been working my butt off to write this chapter! but here it is, finally!!

TW for: descriptions of abuse
stay safe loves!

Jonathan woke up in a dazed confusion. He looked out of the window and saw moonlight, something that wasn't there when he first laid down in Steve's bed.

Oh god, he was in Steve's bed.

All he remembered was Steve deciding on *The Shining*, and them getting through the first twenty minutes... and Jonathan realized that he most likely fell asleep. Way to go, Jonathan, he thought, he probably made a fool of himself the first time he was ever at Steve's house.

It took Jonathan a few more moments to realize that Steve was not in the room with him. He was sitting alone on his bed, halfway covered in a blanket. The credits of the movie were playing extremely quietly on the TV, and the fan was on overhead, showering him in a cold breeze. The only light that was on was the light emitted from the screen of the television, and Jonathan's eyes slowly got used

to the dim aura of the room. He looked around, seeing a few items reflect in the light. They were probably Steve's baseball trophies, which he always brags about, but now he's finally seeing them. Surprising that he wasn't bluffing.

The floor is somewhat messy, some (probably) dirty clothes strewn about and papers thrown carelessly on the floor. It was just dirty enough to assure him that he was staying with a normal teenage boy.

Being in the room alone was making Jonathan feel extremely uncomfortable once he had nothing else to gaze at. The credits of *The Shining* had since turned off, and he was left in the dark in somewhere he wasn't familiar with and it put him on edge. So, with that, he stood up from the bed and threw the blanket carelessly on the bed. The room was so quiet, and it rubbed him in every wrong way. He tiptoed around the room, trying to make as little noise as possible. He didn't know where Steve was, or if he was even here. Jonathan had enough hope in their friendship though that he didn't expect Steve to walk out and leave him alone in his house. He approaches the door, and with great hesitation, he opens it, a sudden gust of cold air hitting his frame as he shivered. He was still in a t-shirt and jeans from school, and maybe he should have gone back to grab his jacket laying by the bed, but he was too far gone now.

Jonathan stepped out of Steve's room with caution. He could hear the murmur of a voice, maybe a few, coming from downstairs. He approached the edge of the staircase and stopped at the edge, suddenly being able to hear the conversation that was happening near the foot of the stairs. He could pick out Steve's voice, but he didn't know who the other belonged to.

"It'll just be for tonight." He hears Steve say. His tone sounds like he's pleading- and he can assume what this conversation is about.

"And you didn't want to tell me first?" He hears the other voice, this time much clearer from where he was standing. It was obviously male, but Jonathan sat in silence and continued to listen to the talk.

"Well, Dad, I thought that maybe considering I'm almost an adult, I'd be able to have a friend over on my own terms." With this,

Jonathan was safe to assume that this second voice was Steve's father. Steve's voice was growing assertive, almost aggressive, and he could hear his facial expression as he listened from the top of the stairwell. He probably rolled his eyes, and had his hands on his hips, and a slight sneer decorated his face.

"Well, Steven, I'm your father, and if I say no- what does that mean?" Steve's dad was getting aggressive, too, completely skipping over being assertive. Jonathan's palms started to sweat, being all too familiar with this situation.

"It means that you're being a *fucking* bastard!" Steve raised his voice, and Jonathan could hear a loud *bang* from downstairs, which could mean an array of things. All he knew was that his breath was quickening and his grip on the railing of the stairwell was tightening.

"Don't talk to me like that, son." Jonathan could barely hear it, and he knew that with the decrease in volume level, Steve's dad was not happy. It was exactly what his father would do to his mother when he was on his last nerve.

"I'll talk to you however the fuck I want. If you're going to be like this, you might as well just *fucking* kick me out!" Steve yelled. Jonathan's thoughts began racing, filled with memories and ideas of what is about to happen- Jonathan could never beat his father. Could Steve beat his? "All you *fucking* care about is your business and the next woman you're sleeping with! You've slept with everyone here, haven't you, that's why you're always out of town, right, Dad?" Steve continued to yell, almost scream, and all Jonathan could do is stand from the back and listen to Steve digging his own grave. He couldn't hear anything on his father's side, and he could only expect that the mannerisms in abusive fathers were the same- his father would always become quiet and stop responding when he got angry. Angry enough to pull off his belt and threaten. Or clench his fists and undermine him.

He heard muffled skin on skin and Jonathan flinched.

"Yeah, hit me. See what that's gonna do, Dad! You can hit me all you want, I'm already used to it, aren't I? Every single *fucking* time

you come home-”

“I’ll do it again, boy. Don’t try me.”

“Do it! Fucking do it, damn it! You want me to follow your rules? It’s hardly even your house anymore, you are never fucking here, screwing another HR lady in the next town over-”

Jonathan heard skin on skin again. And again. And again. A few more times. And with each one, tears spilled unknowingly out of his eyes. Eventually, there was no more screaming, no more hitting, and Jonathan froze in fear as he heard stomps making their way to the staircase. He shook himself out of his paralyzed state and ran back into Steve’s room, grabbing the blanket and sitting in the bed in the same position he was in before. He wiped away any tears, but that wouldn’t cure red, puffy eyes.

Jonathan was effectively faking a slumber when he heard the door of Steve’s room open. He could see out of barely opened eyes Steve’s battered face, and Jonathan had to hold back his own tears as they threatened to spill out again. Steve walked over to the other side of the bed and sat down on the edge, and his stomach flipped when he heard Steve muffle a cry. He wanted to hold him, and tell him it’s okay- he’s felt the same thing too. Feeling like you’re not enough, you’re weak and vulnerable... and caused by your own father. Someone you expect to be there for you.

He heard Steve sniffle as he got up from the bed. Through the slits of his eyes, he could see him grab some clothes and walk out of the room again. Jonathan shot up at that point, feeling his breath quicken. He listened as the water from the shower turned on, and he sighed as images of Steve’s face danced in his mind. He had blood streaming from a cut lip and a bloody nose, and there was a large red mark on the apple of his left cheek. His hands made their way to his own face, dragging over the same places where Steve was injured- feeling the bruises from the beating he had gotten earlier in the week. But he also felt Steve’s hurt, like he had gotten it too. He definitely felt pain for him in his heart.

Jonathan picked himself up and sat on the edge of the bed. He might as well cry now, or else he’d be crying in front of Steve again

for the second time today. So he let them spill, and they came out heavy, but quiet. He thought of every time his father hit him after he chickened out of hunting, every time he stuck out to his father's authority. He remembered the first time it had happened, the day when he had slapped him when they walked on Mirkwood, and he couldn't help but whimper as he thought about young Steve, maybe the same age as him, getting ridiculed by his father. He didn't want to believe that it could have happened. And as another whimper came out of his mouth, the sound of the shower running stopped.

Jonathan quickly shot up, thinking Steve heard him. He wiped his tears, but saw the door stay shut- Steve was still in the bathroom. But it was good that he had stopped himself so quick, because he had a feeling that if he kept letting himself cry he wouldn't have been able to stop. So, he rubbed his cheeks to the point of them almost going raw, but it effectively erased the trace of water. His eyes were still irritated, so hopefully Steve would assume it was because he just woke up.

It was quiet when the door opened. Jonathan didn't want to face Steve, he was nervous that he would be able to tell that he was crying just moments earlier.

"Sorry if we woke you up, dude. Just got into a little bit of an argument." Steve said, as Jonathan felt the dip in the mattress signifying that Steve had sat down too. Jonathan turned around to face him, seeing his face through open eyes. Every injury looked accentuated, and his heart sped up, and his breath quickened. He opened his mouth to speak, but he closed it before he thought to speak. He instead, picked himself up to sit on the other side of the bed with Steve.

"Are you okay?" Steve asked, and Jonathan caught his hands fiddling in his lap.

"Yeah, I just...wanted to see your cut. On your lip." Jonathan whispered. He placed his thumb on Steve's lip, and Steve did nothing in protest. Jonathan looked up to lock eyes with him, but suddenly Jonathan looked down as he felt Steve's hand move to hold his knee. He felt is as instinctual when he leaned in, and Steve did too, and he found himself closing his eyes when suddenly-

Jonathan pulled away in shock when he heard a loud noise come from downstairs. He opened his eyes and watched as Steve opened his too, and he looked away in his feeling of embarrassment. His cheeks were on fire and there was a bigger feeling of just butterflies in his stomach- he was feeling those same emotions he felt a few nights ago. The ones where it felt like his bones were giving out from under him and his head was mixed up- it was foggy with red and pink.

He shook his head to try and clear his mind. "Sorry," he said with hesitation, standing up and rubbing his sweaty palms on his jeans. "I'm going to get my first aid kit in my backpack." He whispered, unintentionally, and he wasn't even sure if Steve heard him. He dared not to look back at Steve, because with what just happened, if he did he might just go back and kiss him without pulling away like he did just now.

"Okay." He heard Steve say in the background, his voice quiet too.

He grabbed the kit from his bag and walked back over to Steve at the bed. He sat down and said nothing, his hands light as he took the alcohol pads out of a bag and started to dab at the dried blood on Steve's face. Steve winced, and Jonathan's hands pulled away just slightly before Steve nodded his head in confirmation that he could continue.

They sat in silence as Jonathan took care of him, just like how Steve had done after Jonathan's trouble with Billy.

"Never thought I'd be in this position, you know?" Jonathan whispered as he put a band aid over a small cut on Steve's cheek.

"What do you mean?" The other asked, laughing quietly as Jonathan lit up with a small smile.

"Never thought I'd be the one that took care of you after a fight." Jonathan's hand fell from Steve's face as he started to pack up his aid kit.

"Yeah, my Dad... he's not the best guy." Steve laughed, looking

down at his feet, and Jonathan couldn't help his concerned face as he thought again about Steve's father hitting him- he thought his father.

"Neither is mine." Was all he could say, as his own eyes dropped down to the ground. He laughed to try and erase the tension, but he knew it didn't work when Steve's smile faded from his face.

"I'm sorry, Jonathan." He hesitated, neither one of their eyes lifting from the ground.

"You don't have to apologize. Your dad seems worse." Jonathan rubbed the back of his neck and he felt like crying. He's dug his hole now and he knew Steve was going to interrogate him about his father when Steve was the one in pain right now. He felt like he was in quicksand, and he didn't know how to get out.

"But-" Steve started, trying to comfort him, but he didn't need comforting. If he's been able to suppress it for this long, he can for a little bit longer. Steve was in pain. He could tell by the look on his face- it was the same look that Will gave him on the nights where their father got extremely drunk and angry at their mother.

"No, Steve. This isn't about me right now." He snapped, his head turning to the side to lock eyes with Steve, finally.

"Jonathan, let me-"

"I just said no, Steve. I don't want to talk about it. This isn't about me. It's about you." Jonathan couldn't help his voice rising slightly, but when he saw the look on Steve's face and how he winced when he said "you"- and upon that he felt himself retreating into his usual hollow shell. Steve looked hurt. Not just physically, but emotionally.

"I'm sorry." He said faintly, looking away from Steve's face. It hurt him to see that he had caused his pain.

"It's okay. I won't press." He responded calmly, and he placed his hand on Jonathan's back. Jonathan wanted to start crying again, but it took all of it in him to hold the tears back.

Again, this was exactly where he didn't want to be. Just like in his

position in the fight with Billy a few days earlier- Jonathan was showing weakness. Somehow, he was always vulnerable even though he had strong walls built around him- and they've been there for years. He didn't have friends because part of him didn't want them, and the other part was because he was scrawny and pretty much socially inept- he was fairly sure the only reason a pretty girl like Nancy was friends with him was because she felt bad. He didn't know how to fight, he didn't know how to flirt, hell, he didn't even know the gender he wanted to flirt with. But, when he talked to Steve, and watched him smile and laugh, he felt a heat in his heart like nothing else. When he saw the look of pain on Steve's face, his heart seethed with pain. Every time he was with him, he watched as every one of his walls fell down to let him in completely, his body against his mind. He wanted to keep his walls up, to be hesitant, to not let himself fall too soon...but with every day they spend together, he knows he's already fallen down a deep, dark hole.

They sat in silence for a while, until Jonathan was growing so uncomfortable that he had to say something. He needed to find anything in the room he could start a conversation about, or just something to get someone talking, because he couldn't stand the silence. He saw a guitar in a dark corner of Steve's room, obviously overlooked, because you could see the dust collecting on the neck.

"Do you play?" He asks. He watches as Steve perks up and looks over to his guitar.

"Uh, yeah. Kinda. I don't play it much anymore." He answers, standing up and walking over to the corner where it resides. As he walks back over, Jonathan gets sprayed with a cloud of dust as Steve wipes off the neck of the guitar, and he laughs in between his coughs as Steve stumbles when saying sorry. When his coughing subsides, he continues to smile as Steve sits back down on the bed and tweaks with the tuning pegs. "It's been months," He says, pressing on some of the frets and plucking to make sure he's tuned to the right note. Jonathan watches in awe. He doesn't really know how to play any real instruments- he can only drum. And it's only on a crappy, cheap drum set he got for his tenth birthday. He can kind of sing, too, but that doesn't mean he thinks he's exceptional at it. "I can't play much." Steve continues, but Jonathan knows he's bluffing when he starts to

play quietly.

He's filled with emotion when he strums the first chord. His fingers dance on each fret, on every note. The way he strums so perfectly- he's never gotten chills like this. Steve looks so calm, too, like he's where he's supposed to be. His eyes are closed, and he has the smallest smile on his face and he plucks out a riff, leaving Jonathan star struck and wanting more when he stops and opens his eyes.

"That was amazing." He felt like that was the best way to associate his emotions right now.

"Anything you'd like to request?" Steve questions, his hands playing around with chords once again and Jonathan almost forgets his answer as he is mesmerized by Steve and the way his hands move on the frets.

He shakes himself out of his trance and he nods. "Can you play Hotel California?" He's surprised when Steve's hands move up excitedly to the neck of the guitar and he strums out the first chord.

"You bet your ass I can!" He laughed, continuing to strum out the beginning of the song.

He found it hard to suppress a gasp, though, when Steve started singing.

His voice was smooth when he sang, like a rich honey or mocha, and the look on his face was a sight for sore eyes. Between verses he bit his lip as he strummed the bridge between and he found himself staring more than once. It's a pleasant surprise after the ordeal they just went through, and to listen to his voice made every worry, every concern, and every fear of their interactions together. He knew his walls were down, and he was okay with it. If this was what being vulnerable meant, he was okay with it.

As Steve continued to sing, they both were surprised when Jonathan started singing the harmony lines. Steve's face was ecstatic when they got to the chorus and he started singing along, and Jonathan almost didn't even realize he did it. But he sang with him and their voices interlocked with one another, fitting like a lock and

key with each pitch. As the chorus ended, Jonathan shut his mouth, so he could listen to Steve's voice just a little bit more.

Jonathan was extremely let down when Steve decided to stop playing after that.

"You sounded awesome! Why'd you stop?" He asked, dropping the guitar to let it sit in his lap.

"I... don't know," He responded, even though he knew that that was a lie. He thought to say in his head "I wanted to keep hearing you sing." Because yes, that was the truth. But when he saw Steve blush and laugh as he looked away bashfully, he realized that he just said that out loud. Obviously, he didn't catch himself before it was too late, and he was left with the humiliation he felt after almost pretty much confessing to his crush right in front of his face.

"That's sweet, Byers. But I'm no magician on the guitar or the ears." Steve joked, placing the guitar on the ground.

"You are so, so wrong. On both of those statements." He said it with the most serious face, and Steve stopped laughing. Jonathan quickly realized that maybe he was coming off a bit too strong, so he let a smile grace his lips as Steve picked up the guitar once more.

"What time is it?" Jonathan asked, looking out at the night sky through Steve's window across the room. He wasn't sure if he had even remembered to call his mom or not. He probably hadn't.

"It's 10:30, why?" Steve replied, not concentrating on Jonathan, but more the guitar.

"I should probably be heading home, I didn't call my mom, I don't think, and she's probably wondering where I am-" He started to ramble, and he was taken by surprise when Steve's hand came to rest on his arm.

"Woah, Jonny, calm down. Are you sure you don't want to go call her and ask?" Steve's tone was gentle, and his grasp on his arm was comforting. But, wasn't his dad downstairs? Where the phone is? And with the conversation that happened earlier, Jonathan didn't know

how much he wanted to risk that.

“Your father is downstairs. Right?” He asked. Steve’s eyes went wide with realization.

“Fuck, you’re right.” Steve’s face went from realization to concentration. His brows were furrowed, and his lips were pursed, and Jonathan could only sit back and watch his outward thinking. “Follow me,” he said, dropping the guitar on the bed and starting to walk to his window. They weren’t about to do what he thought they were going to, right?

“How much do you weigh?” Steve asked, his head poking out of the now open window.

“One-twenty.” he answered, his own eyes going wide this time when he understands why Steve asked him.

“We’re going to rule that out, then.”

“What were you going to do?” Jonathan asked, even though he was pretty sure he already knew.

“Well, I was going to climb out, and then, like, catch you or something.” Jonathan’s cheeks lit up as Steve’s did.

“Where are we even supposed to be going?” Jonathan asked, grabbing his jacket as he felt a gust of cold wind come from outside.

“I’m gonna walk you home, like a gentleman should.” Steve laughed. “What else would I be doing?”

“I don’t know, probably dragging me out to the middle of the woods and like, killing me or something.” Jonathan started laughing too, and he laughed even more when he watched Steve struggle to get through the window.

“I’m still getting the hang of it,” He said, even though he was muffled. “Like, the first time I ever sneaked since I was fourteen was three nights ago.”

“Are you kidding? For me?”

“All for you, babe.”

“What?” Jonathan froze, his head already out the window as he looks down at Steve standing on the roof. He nervously chuckles as he watches Steve suddenly realize what he said.

“What? I didn’t say anything.” That was a lie. Jonathan swore he just heard Steve Harrington call him baby. He knew that the rest of the night was either going to be super awkward, or hopefully they’d just brush it off. There was a third option, and that was for Jonathan to start confessing his love to Steve, but he knew that that was the wrong choice. “Let’s not talk about it.” Steve added, turning around to slide off the roof, landing two feet on the ground.

“I guess it’s my turn?” Jonathan yelled down to him, looking at the drop to the roof in fear. He stuck out his legs and sat on the rim of the window, trying to slide himself down and brace himself with his hands. He sighed when he let go and landed on top of the roof without much of a hassle, but it was a new story when it came to getting off of the roof. He knew he fucked up when his shoe slipped off the edge.

“Woah, fuck!” He heard Steve yell as he fell from the roof. He felt like his entire life was flashing before his eyes as he ran through a surge of emotions before not feeling the impact he thought he would. He had landed on the bushes below him, and he could only assume it was Steve's arms that were under him.

“Holy *shit*.” Jonathan whispered, looking over at Steve while trying to catch his breath.

“Did I just hear Jonathan Byers curse?” Steve said in response to his language, letting Jonathan catch his bearings as he continued to hold him in his arms.

“Sorry.”

“Don’t be sorry. It’s a nice change.”

“You can let me down, now, you know.”

“Oh. Yeah, sure.” Steve shifted Jonathan off the bushes and let him

stand up, slightly stumbling as he got used to the ground again.

“Thanks, sorry.” He mumbled, remembering that he forgot to thank Steve for pretty much saving his life from only a seven-foot drop.

“Sure.”

They had been walking for a while, and they were close to Jonathan’s house when the clock struck 11.

A majority of the walk was spent silent. But it was a good silent, if that made sense. They talked a small bit about music once again, and when Jonathan told Steve that he knew how to play the drums, Steve said he “swooned.” Jonathan could only laugh and try to hide his blush in the dim streetlights.

Jonathan realized that ever since he’s been hanging out with Steve, he’s been blushing a lot more. And when he keeps saying to himself that Steve is his crush, he started to believe that it was a bit more than that. Was he falling in love or was he just fooling himself to believe that Steve actually liked him? He thought back on how he had called him babe earlier, and maybe he was truly starting to believe that yes, he was falling in love.

But nowhere did Jonathan ever state that he wanted to do that.

Jonathan never signed up to fall in love- when he became friends with Steve all he expected was maybe a friend, finally, and while he thought that Steve was attractive... he knew that love was hard. And it always ended with pain. Every relationship he’s ever seen has ended with at least one person left in the dust, forgotten and hurt, and he didn’t want that to be him. Steve Harrington was Steve Harrington, and he didn’t have the best reputation in the department

of relationships.

“So.” Nancy said, her mascara running down her face.

“I’m so, so sorry, Nance. He’s a scumbag.” Jonathan tried to comfort her as she started to cry again, just after she had managed to fix her mascara. Jonathan hadn’t been at school that day, he was sick, but within twenty minutes of school getting out, Nancy walked into the Byers residence and started crying the moment she sat down on Jonathan’s bed.

“He broke up with me, Jon. He dumped me in front of all his friends.” She whimpered, holding her head in her hands.

Steve and Nancy had been dating for eight months' worth of their Sophomore year. From how Nancy made it sound, they were both hopelessly in love with each other, but with the way that he never saw Steve put his arm around her at lunch, how he never dared to kiss her in public... he wasn't sure if Steve was in love as she was. But he couldn't say that now, of course, because Nancy was his friend, not Steve. Like Steve Harrington would even be caught dead just talking to him.

“I’m sorry, Nancy. But, there’s... there’s more fish in the sea, you know?” was all he could think to say, putting an arm around her as she shook her head.

“He’s the only one I want, Jon. And according to him, I’m just a fucking bother.” Nancy swore, her voice raspy and deeper than normal.

“What did he say to you?” Jonathan asked, his grip around her frame getting tighter.

“He- he told me- he said that I was too clingy, just because I wanted him to show me some actual fucking signs of affection... He never introduced me as his girlfriend, he never took me to meet his parents- and I-” She had to take a deep breath because she couldn’t breathe behind the tears. “I asked him why and he automatically just got fucking defensive and he said if I was going to be so needy we could just ‘end it right there’, and he walked away, and- and- I saw him walking with Nicole Brooks on the way out! Nicole fucking Brooks!” She wailed even louder at the mention of her name.

Jonathan remembered how Nancy had told him a few weeks ago that according to rumor, Steve was seen hanging out with and getting drinks for him and Nicole at a party a few weeks before- the one party that Nancy didn't go with Steve to. Everyone was talking about it at the time, and people had already thought they had broken up, and Steve never denied the fact that apparently him and Nicole kissed. But, Nancy said that he had personally told her that they didn't do anything, and Nancy decided to believe him.

Jonathan knew that it was going to end up bad the moment they got together.

"Jonathan, please promise you will never fucking talk to Steve Harrington. Ever."

"I promise, Nance."

"Swear to it?"

"Cross my heart."

Since then, Nancy and Steve had made up, somewhat. They didn't talk, but Steve apologized to her, for being a "shitty boyfriend". Nancy said she was "cool" with him after that, but she said they couldn't ever be friends again. And Jonathan understood that. He wouldn't want to talk to his ex either, even if he didn't have one.

Jonathan then remembered how excited Nancy was when Jonathan told her that they were talking, though. It was most likely she was just glad that Jonathan was finally talking to people- or getting people talking to him.

But with the story of Nancy and Steve's relationship crumbling, and the pain that Nancy was in when she came home to Jonathan the night it happened... he didn't know how much he wanted to risk the feeling of love.

"We're here, Johnny!" Steve yelled, and it threw Jonathan off his train of thought.

"Oh, yeah... let me just go in and get my stuff." He said, walking in front of Steve and up to the front door.

“Get your stuff?” Steve said, his head turning towards the side like a puppy. Jonathan giggled, and Steve started to smile.

“Yeah, I’m gonna go tell my Mom I’m sleeping over. I’m gonna grab my clothes, too.”

“You better be glad it’s a Friday, Johnny.” Was the last thing that Steve said to him as he left him outside while he ran to get his things. He soared through the house, grabbing a small duffle bag and stuffing a random assortment of clothes in it- he also almost knocked over a lamp while bolting in and out of the bathroom to get his toothbrush. He would have been out in a good five minutes before his mom stopped him before he left.

“Where have you been? And where do you think you are going?” Joyce asked, crossing her arms over her work uniform.

“I’ve- uh- been at a friend’s house, actually.” He mumbled, and the look on his Mom’s face was scrapbook worthy. “He’s uh... standing outside. I came to get my stuff to stay over.”

“Oh, Jonathan, how nice! You should have just called me and told me!” She was grinning ear to ear as she engulfed Jonathan in a tight hug. Jonathan could only cringe as she said “Let me go outside and meet him, goodness! Why didn’t you invite him in!”

“Mom, you’re acting like he’s my boyfriend or something. He’s just a friend.”

“Yeah, and this is the first friend that’s not Nancy I’ve heard about since Tommy.”

“Well, just come outside with me, Mom. He’ll be glad to meet you, I’m sure.” Jonathan sighed as he opened the door, the image of his Mom’s proud smile plastered in his mind. As the door opened, he saw Steve jump up from sitting on the front of the car, and then smile as he saw Joyce exit the door behind Jonathan

“Ms. Byers, it’s you! Jonathan has only said so much good.” Steve was automatically charming, and it wasn’t surprising. The first time that Jonathan and Steve had talked just a few days ago, Steve

brushed him off his feet with his charming smile and the way he spoke his words. It seemed like he was like that with everyone.

“Oh, stop! Call me Joyce, please! I’m so happy that Johnny has made some damn friends!” She laughed, bringing Steve in for a hug too.

“Of course, Joyce. I hope to be the best damn friend he’s ever had.”

“If you’re not, you know I’ll kill you.” Jonathan cringed at her overprotective-ness.

“Wouldn’t dream of it, Joyce. Well, we’ll be off then. You ready, Jonny?” Steve gestured to the road ahead, and Jonathan nodded.

“Okay, go set off, you kids. Be careful on the streets at night, and bring him home whenever you’d like, Steve!”

“Will do, Joyce!” He yelled back to her, Jonathan staying quiet for most of the interaction. “Your mom seems sweet, Jon. Glad she got rid of your scumbag father, obviously.” He laughed, and Jonathan couldn’t help but laugh along.

“Yeah, glad she did.” He rubbed the back of his neck. Once again, they were at the topic of his father. He didn’t have the guts in him to tell Steve to not bring him up, but he guesses that he’ll just have to deal with some uncomfortableness.

“Was she saying the truth? When she said that you hardly have like, any friends?” Steve looked over to Jonathan as they walked out of the driveway, his hand extending to Jonathan. He didn’t know what he was implying. When he said, “I’ll hold your bag.” His mind immediately cleared up and he handed him the duffle.

“Well, she never said that, you know. I have friends.”

“You talk to Nancy, and that’s about it.”

“How do you know that? We’ve been talking for what, five days? And you think you know me.” Jonathan was starting to get defensive. The topic of having “friends” was never a big thing for him- he knew he didn’t have a lot, and while he couldn’t really do anything about it

because he knew no one liked him anyway, it did make him feel alone at times.

“I know because all this year the only person I’ve ever seen you talk to is Nancy. She’s the only person you walk the halls with.” Steve’s voice was getting stern too, and Jonathan’s fake act of feeling strong was shut down as Steve looked at him. He was helpless, Steve had caught him. His bones felt like gelatin and he felt like his brain was about to explode. He was going to die from humiliation under the eyes of Steve Harrington.

“Let’s just... stop talking about it.”

“Okay, Johnny.”

They stopped at the quarry on the way back home to Steve’s.

Was it weird that Jonathan caught himself almost call it home?

“Has he always... been like this?” Jonathan asked, breaking the silence that he almost hadn’t even realized. The night was serene. There was a full moon hanging above them, and the dim light of the stars in the sky lit up Steve’s face in all of the right ways. The hum of the crickets was low and Jonathan was so comforted in just the presence of him, but the only thing that would make it better would be to hear his voice.

“Yeah, I guess. I don’t ever really remember a time he hasn’t been a dipshit to me.” Steve’s face was hard to read in the dark. He couldn’t tell if he was sad or if he didn’t care- he seemed pretty nonchalant with it when it had just happened earlier today.

“I’m sorry.”

“It’s okay.”

It was silent for another stretch of about a minute.

“What about yours?” Steve asked, and Jonathan knew this moment was going to come eventually. No matter how uncomfortable he felt.

“I remember him being okay, at one point. He used to love our family. I don’t really know what happened... he started drinking. And it all went downhill.” He confessed, sighing at the end of his sentence. “He used to beat my mom up. And me, sometimes. I’m just...so fucking thankful he never got to Will.” He dared not look over to Steve as he stopped talking. His eyes were probably sorrowful, and he’d extend a hand out to Jonathan, and he’d comfort him-

“I’m sorry, Jonathan. I- I don’t know what to say.”

“It’s okay. I... haven’t talked to him in months.”

“I wish,” Steve started, sighing and slouching as Jonathan looked back over to him. “ Mine wants me to work for him- for the family business. Wants me to take over the company when he retires. But if that makes me a deadbeat dad like him, then I don’t want to.”

“You want kids?” Jonathan asked, slightly surprised.

“Yeah, why wouldn’t I?”

“Just thought. Most playboys in high school don’t settle down.” Steve scoffed at Jonathan’s claim, running a hand through his hair.

“Even you think I’m a playboy? I got out of that phase sophomore year.”

“How many girlfriends have you had, Harrington?”

“Three.”

“And boyfriends?”

“None.”

“Really?” Jonathan asked, slightly baffled. He was sure that he had

to have had more than that- there were new rumors every week about who he was in a relationship with now.

“Yeah, I guess I’m not as much as a playboy as you think.”

“Huh. Sorry to assume, Harrington.” Jonathan said, looking over to Steve.

“No harm, no foul, Byers.” Steve looked over to Jonathan. They locked eyes and Jonathan gulped. He looked up at the full moon, and the stars. He pointed up to the sky, pointing out Orion’s belt.

“You see it?” He asked, trying to draw it out.

“See what?” Steve whispered, obviously trying his best to follow the movements of Jonathan’s hands.

“Whatever, it’s not that cool anyway.” Jonathan laughed as he dropped his hand, the space between them growing silent again.

“I think whatever you like is cool. I think you are super cool, Jonathan.”

“Can I hold your hand?” Jonathan asked with no hesitation. He looked at Steve as his cheeks burned red, the light of the moon not doing it justice, but doing it enough so Steve couldn’t see how nervous he was.

“Of course.” Steve told him, and he held out his palm. Jonathan let his own fall into his grasp, and without second thought, he interlocked their fingers. Jonathan couldn’t look at him, because he was still so nervous, but under the moonlight, he felt so, so happy.

Steve Harrington was holding his hand. And everything was okay.

Notes for the Chapter:

i really hoped you enjoyed this one! this is probably my favorite chapter (so far ;)
follow my tumblr for updates on my fics and other stuff like stranger things, rupauls drag race, and more ;)

tumblr- @lillianthekidd

5. Blissith

Summary for the Chapter:

Jonathan doesn't want to accept it; but maybe he needs to learn to.

Notes for the Chapter:

okay....here yall hungry fuckers go!!!! i hope i make yall cry with this one!!!

and also i really hope you guys realize that i get all of my chapter names from songs. even the title of this story is from an album. i'll start leaving the songs in the notes here at the beginning in the next chapters, and i'll leave the previous ones in the end notes!

this chapter's song is "blissith" by sorority noise!

also, please be warned that there is a fight scene in this chapter and it is semi graphic! stay safe, loves!

It was close to one when they got back in the car, hands still interlocked. Jonathan couldn't rid his face of his obviously never-ending blush. His smile was prominent, too, and for once maybe he was okay with his teeth showing through a small gap of his mouth. When they got in the car, they had to let go, and Jonathan chuckled as Steve looked up to him and widened his eyes, almost like he was scared to let go. They walked into the car and almost immediately grabbed each other's hands once again, almost instinctually.

"So," Jonathan started, looking out onto the road in front of them. It was quiet, especially for a Friday night, because usually there was at least one curbside party happening in what used to be the quiet hours of the night.

"So," Steve responded along with him, their hands resting silently on the dashboard between the driver's and passenger's seats.

"You sure are a charmer, Steve Harrington." Jonathan laughed, clutching his hand a little harder in Steve's grasp. Steve did the same,

looking over to Jonathan and laughing too.

“What do you mean by that, Byers?” He asked, flipping his hair out of his eyes as it was faltering.

“My mom loves you, it’s obvious.” He looks down at his feet, silently hoping that Steve didn’t take it the wrong way, but also silently hoping that he took in the way that he didn’t intend but was totally referencing.

For once, Jonathan didn’t feel scared. He didn’t feel anxious, he didn’t feel like crying, he didn’t feel like he was seconds away from a breakdown at any given moment. He knew nothing could hurt him when he was with him, with Steve. He’s become his bodyguard, pretty much, just like he said he was going to be when they first met. But, he’s become more than a bodyguard, something more than that. He’s become his best friend, someone who he wished would be more than his best friend, his guardian angel. If he was around Steve...he was safe. He couldn’t remember the last time he felt *safe*.

“Wow, I’m honored.” Steve breaks him out of his trance, and he finds himself staring off into the abyss that is the dark road in front of them with his mouth slightly agape. “Jon? You okay?” Steve asks, clutching Jonathan’s hand in his own.

Jonathan shakes himself out of his stupor and blinks a few times to bring him back, and he grasps Steve’s hand. He listens to Steve let out a calming exhale before he nods his head yes and looks down at his feet once again.

“You should be,” He picks conversation back up again, feeling embarrassed about the scene he just caused. “My mom is a hard lady to please. I think it’s just because you’re like, the first person I’ve brought home in ages.” Jonathan admitted, chuckling nervously as he braced his chin on one hand and looked out the window.

“First person you’ve brought home? You make me seem like a little more than a friend, Byers.” Steve laughed and Jonathan took his head off his hands as he took a deep breath in. He hadn’t meant for it to come out like *that*, but he didn’t mind that it did either. Either way, that wasn’t what he meant and he could feel the red rise back to

his cheeks.

“Not like that, you know that.” He laughed nervously, his grasp on Steve’s hand becoming lighter and lighter until he pulled his hand away and wiped it on his jeans. He didn’t want to look in Steve’s direction when he *knew* he would have that look on his face, somewhat of disappointment and somewhat of betrayal just because he stopped holding his hand. He didn’t want to stop, but something in his mind told him to. *Something* .

“Dad, no, I don’t want to go-” He struggled with his father’s vice-like grip on his hand. His father’s other hand held a gun as they waded through the snow, and with every step, Jonathan tried and tried to thrash himself out of his father’s grasp.

“Don’t think your principal didn’t tell me and you mother that kids have been calling you a queer-” His father grunted in anger, an anger that Jonathan could never become unfamiliar with. “Don’t you dare think he didn’t tell me that they saw you holding hands with- who- that fucking Roberts boy?” With every word it was like he was spitting venom straight into Jonathan’s eyes, and he wanted to cry it out but he couldn’t show a face of weakness in front of his father. He was twelve now, and he would be damned if he dared to shed a single tear in his father’s presence.

“Dad, please, just let me go-” Jonathan grunted as his father shoved him down into the snow, shoving a gun into his gloved hands. He looked down at the hard metal and he could only gulp as his father pulled him up, and he was shaking profusely once his father made him crouch down as he saw a perfectly white rabbit hop across the snow in front of them.

He felt a tear slip from an eye as he heard a loud bang from his father’s gun, and as the dead rabbit was brought back up to Jonathan, dotting red in the red snow in front of him, his father told him,

“Maybe that’ll teach you that I won’t have a queer in my house.”

He had become uncomfortable.

They pulled into Steve’s house and his leg was relentlessly bouncing,

even making it hard to walk when he stood up next to the car. He grabbed his duffle bag and followed closely behind Steve, walking into his house quietly. Jonathan's heart close to stopped when they saw Steve's father asleep on the couch, his reddened fists laying on his stomach. Steve turned around and placed a finger over his lips, and Jonathan got the message immediately. They tip-toed up the stairs, constantly looking over their shoulders to make sure Steve's father never woke. He didn't, thank god, and when they entered Steve's room Jonathan dropped his duffle bag with a loud sigh.

"That was one of the most terrifying experiences I've ever encountered." He said as he threw himself onto Steve's bed, Steve dropping down next to him.

"I'll make sure that I never make you feel that uncomfortable in my house ever again." He laughed, looking over to Jonathan and Jonathan had to lock eyes with him. He laughed too, covering his face with his hands.

"You're adorable, Byers." He heard Steve whisper, and maybe he said it so quietly to make sure that Jonathan didn't hear him. But he did, and he laughed before he said,

"You're crazy, Harrington." He couldn't hold back his howl of laughter when he heard Steve almost choke- and he had to put a hand over his mouth before he could have woken up Steve's dad downstairs. But, he was still laughing unbelievably hard, and it only continued when he saw Steve's cheeks light up red like holly berries.

"You're calling me crazy?" He stumbled, obviously attempting to change the subject of conversation. "You haven't met Nicole Brooks."

"We aren't talking about Nicole, Steve!" He laughed, doubling over on his side while trying to catch his own breath.

"We are now! She was always on my tail- she showed up at my *house* once because I didn't answer the phone- I never even gave her my number!"

Jonathan was having a terrible time trying to contain his laughter. He pulled himself back up to an upright position and sat himself in

front of Steve, their knees touching. He placed his head on his hands and he continued to listen to Steve go on about Nicole Brooks and the crazy, stalker-ish things she did to Steve.

Ten minutes into Steve's rant, Jonathan tried his best to contain it before letting a yawn crawl out, and he blinked his eyes slowly as he started to feel his head pound slightly from his lack of sleep.

"Oh, Jon, I forget. Some people actually need to sleep." Steve whispered as Jonathan giggled to his statement, playfully hitting him on the shoulder. His smile lit up again for what seemed like the hundredth time that night, more than it had in months. Nancy could never make him laugh so hard- nor feel so protected.

"Oh, Steve, I forgot that obviously you're not human. I actually like to sleep." He laughed, starting to lay down in the bed and completely putting off changing into pajamas. Steve got up from the bed and pulled the covers back, exposing them for Jonathan to get under as he kicked off his shoes and tucked himself in, Steve following closely behind him. He turned himself to face away from the other, wondering how they would sleep consciously and comfortably as two boys in a full bed together. He could feel the bed dip next to him where Steve was, and part of him wanted to turn over to his other side, and have Steve hold him in his arms... but he wouldn't do that. He wasn't going to make the first move.

When did he accept that he was okay with falling in love with him? He doesn't remember, but he knows that it's happened somewhere along the line- maybe it was when they held hands in the car, when Steve held him as he shook and cried in the darkroom, or maybe when he first introduced himself to him and left that slip of paper on his nightstand that left his number after he got his ass handed to him by Billy.

He ran his fingers over his face, tracing the scabbed-over cut that was where Billy nicked him with his ring.

Maybe it was then.

Jonathan flipped over to his other side and watched as Steve opened his eyes.

“Do you want me to turn off the light?” He asked, sitting up and putting his hand on the lamp. Jonathan nodded, feeling comforted in the pitch black around them. He sighed and listened as Steve shifted back into the bed.

“Steve?” He whispered, waiting silently for a response.

“Yeah, Johnny?” He heard Steve whisper back, his voice light and quiet. Peaceful. Calm.

“Do you- can we... I-” He stumbled, and he could swear that his face was glowing like hot metal even in the complete darkness, but it faltered when he felt Steve’s hand move under the cover to place itself on Jonathan’s arm. He immediately closed his mouth as Steve inched closer to Jonathan, holding his against his chest. Their faces were undeniably, awkwardly close, and Jonathan swore that if he were to just move his face an inch closer, they’d have themselves a problem.

Nonetheless, Jonathan felt good. He shut his eyes, his breathing growing steady as he let his body drift off into a slumber. Just before he completely succumbed to his fatigue, he heard Steve whisper, but just loud enough where Jonathan could hear it,

“Sweet dreams, Jon.”

He smiled, even though Steve couldn’t see him in the dark, and he fell asleep.

Jonathan wakes up with Steve not by his side. His immediate response is to flip out, because last time this happened Steve had ended up with his ass beat by his father. Jonathan quickly calms himself down, though, when he hears the beginning of loud music from downstairs. *In The Air Tonight* is blasting, full volume, and Jonathan has to admit that he never saw Steve as a Phil Collins kind-of-guy.

He hauls himself down the stairs to see Steve in the kitchen, cleaning

up with two plates of breakfast sitting side by side on their dining table.

“Oh, Jonathan, you’re up. I was gonna surprise you, and like, give you breakfast in bed...or something.” Jonathan couldn’t help but blush as he listened to Steve begin to ramble and light up the more he went on and on, it was cute, surprisingly. “My dad’s off on another business trip, the bastard,”

“Oh, uh,” It might have been cute when Steve tripped on his words, but it was honestly cringe-worthy when Jonathan did it. “It’s fine.” He stopped himself from getting too out of hand. He shuffled to the dining table, stuffing his hands in his pockets of the jeans from yesterday. He couldn’t even begin to imagine what his hair looked like right now, nevermind his *face*, but of course, when he looked over to Steve, he looked immaculately handsome in his pajamas.

It had been a short period of Jonathan feeling safe in the presence of Steve. It seems like they were back to square one in Jonathan’s mind—he’s starting to feel the pressure of talking to the school’s top dog once again. Maybe it was the fact that Jonathan actually thought that Steve might be in love with him the way he was with him, or the fact that they held hands, but there was a nagging sense in the back of his mind that told him that his walls needed to *stay* up, and for no reason whatsoever should he be thinking that he’s safe around someone who used to bully him so long ago. Broke up with his best friend in front of all of his friends.

But maybe Steve had changed? That was up for him to decide in the future.

“So,” Steve started, his voice muffled behind a face shoved full of food. Jonathan could feel his heart flutter when he looked over to him, and he tried extra hard to make it stop before he knew it wasn’t going to happen. No matter how intimidated he was of him, no matter how much he couldn’t forgive him for how he’s treated him and Nancy in the past, no matter whether his walls would stay up or not... he couldn’t stop himself from feeling like he was falling hopelessly and dramatically in love. It was like one of those bad teen romance novels.

"I was thinking that after this we could go to the arcade?" Steve said after finally finishing his food, and Jonathan could only pick at his plate as he contemplated the idea. It was Saturday morning, afternoon maybe, and they'd be going to the arcade. Where people from their school could definitely see them- the school freakshow and one of the most popular kids there. Not to mention, they were both boys. Men. He wasn't sure whether he would want to deal with all of the kids torturing them at school for the years to come if they were seen outside of school together.

"Sure." Jonathan mumbled, putting his fork down on his half-eaten plate of eggs and bacon. Steve raised an eyebrow, just one, in a look of confusion. Jonathan could only lay his head on his hand at the table, his thoughts getting the absolute best of him. It was just last night where he asked Steve to hold his hand, to hold him while they slept, and now he was back to the point where he wasn't sure whether he could trust him or not. Even if he didn't, though, he'd have to come up with a way to fall out of love. And when he looked over to Steve whistling in the kitchen while he washed their dishes, he knew he would never be able to bring himself to that point.

When the clock hits one, they pull into the parking lot of the arcade with a skidding break. Jonathan has to shake his head to get it through his own head that no, *he isn't dead*, but yes, Steve did almost just kill them by running through at least three stop signs and almost hitting a group of kids crossing the road.

"Sorry, Jon," He said as they climbed out of the car, Jonathan pulling himself up from the shock of that car ride by the hood of the car. "Got a little ahead of myself." He laughed, walking in front of Jonathan to the butt end of the car.

Steve looked even better out of his pajamas and in nice clothes. Not nice ones that you wear to school, no, the ones you save *especially* for the weekend. He had an Izod sweater that hugged him perfectly in the chilly October breeze, and slightly tight Levi jeans that looked so perfect in all of the right places. His hair was messed up, but in the good way, with at least a handful of hair gel. He leaned on the trunk of the car, and with the way he was looking, Jonathan had to hold back his feeling to swoon in front of him. He walked closer to him,

slightly leaning onto the trunk of the car like he was doing. Steve pulled out a cigarette from his back pocket, picking it up to his lips carefully and swiftly as he flicked a lighter to the tip easily. He took a swift drag, and Jonathan could only cringe in response.

“Don’t tell me you hate it too.” Steve said quietly as he held the cigarette to his side, at least being polite enough to obviously read the disgust on Jonathan’s face and hold it away from him.

“It’s gonna ruin your lungs, you know.” Jonathan said, plugging his nose as the smoke still found a way to follow him.

“Yeah, I know. Not as easy as you think to quit.” Steve said as he looked down at his feet, Jonathan seeing the look in his eyes almost like disappointment. He knew the way it looked well, because he’s looked at himself in the mirror more than enough to learn what the human embodiment of the word looks like.

“I’m just saying. I care about you too much to lose you to cancer.” Jonathan whispered, slouching against the trunk of the car and sighing. Steve flicked the but of the cigarette to ash off the tip, and Jonathan couldn’t bare to watch him take another drag of it. He almost didn’t watch Steve look down at Jonathan, and back to the stick in his hands, and throwing it to his left in front of Jonathan. He crushed it with his boot, even with still more than half of it left.

“Don’t tell me you did that for me. I know how much those things cost.” Jonathan said as Steve started to walk up to the arcade doors.

Steve looked at him with a reassuring glare. “I didn’t do it for you, then.” He grabbed the door and pulled it open, gesturing for Jonathan to take the first step inside. He walked in with only a slight hesitation in his step.

The arcade was cold, and Jonathan was glad that at least he wore his denim jacket. His outfit was at least semi-stylish today, but he still looked leagues under Steve. Whereas Steve had name brands, Jonathan had the thrift store down the street. He was dressed in a plain, dark red turtleneck and loose jeans, the denim jacket sticking to his frame comfortably. His hair was just brushed through, and his shoes definitely needed to be cleaned, so of course when he was

placed next to Steve, he looked like less than a hundred bucks.

As Jonathan looked around the arcade, he could already spot a few kids from their school. It was mostly boys, but he saw some freshmen girls too, all standing either at the bar tables eating or staring into the abysses of video game screens. He gulped when they walked deeper into the sea of kids laughing and giggling, and Jonathan could never decipher whether they were laughing at him or the screen. Steve seemed to realize his discomfort when he finally pulled up to a game that no one was at and leaned in to his face.

“Are you okay? Do you want to leave?” Steve asked, his hand laying on Jonathan’s arm. He shook himself out of Steve’s grasp, looking nervously around to the rest of the people around them to make sure they didn’t see their interaction. Nobody seemed to care about Steve and Jonathan’s conversation. Steve looked at him with a vision of disappointment when he lowered his hand.

He managed to get out a quiet “It’s okay.” Before Steve nodded and looked to the game they were sitting at. His face lit up and Jonathan looked up to see what could be the sign of his sudden change in emotion, and saw the game header. *Galaga*. A favorite of Will’s and his, to say the least.

“This is my favorite game, I swear to it!” Steve gushed, starting to frantically press buttons, and suddenly hitting a single button to get to the scoreboards. Jonathan watched his face go from excitement, to fear, to disbelief. He was sitting front row seat to a soap opera as he watched Steve’s array of emotions. He suddenly realized the cause of it, when he looked to the screen, seeing the name “Steve” at the second highest scoring. Above it was some under “MadMax”, and Jonathan had to stop himself from laughing when Steve’s head hit the desk of the game in defeat. He would have tried to aid him in feeling better if his attention was not caught by the head of flaming red hair that passed next to them.

He knew that face. It was the same girl that Will had shown him in the photo, Max. She was the one who was trying to join Will’s group of friends. She was visibly angry, her cheeks red and fists clenched as she held her skateboard under her arm. He looked at her for a little bit longer, and if he hadn’t he wouldn’t have realized the extremely

red and almost purple mark on her arm. It looked like a handprint.

“Steve,” He whispered, urging for him to pick his head up. When he did, he pointed over to Max where she was standing at a game a few spots away from them, hitting buttons aggressively and white-knuckling the joystick. It was obvious when he noticed the mark on her arm too, but he forgot the most important reason why he brought it up. “Steve, that’s Billy’s little sister.”

“You have to be fucking kidding me, Jon,” He grunts, standing up from the game. Jonathan realizes he has to try to calm him down once he gets up and starts to walk to the door, but it’s no use when he slams it open and lays eyes on Billy, chatting up some girl in the parking lot while leaning on the hood of his Camaro.

When they lock eyes on each other, Jonathan knows the fight has already started. With unprecedented rage, Steve went barreling for Billy, his fist clenched and landing a solid right hook. Jonathan flinched as he stood in the background, standing uncomfortably behind Steve. He didn’t know what to do, especially when Billy spat out a mouthful of blood and wiped his lip.

“Well I’ll be damned, It’s Steve Harrington!” He purred, pulling his cigarette back up to his lips and taking a long drag.

“Don’t act like your sister didn’t just walk in with her fucking arm bruised, Billy.” Steve hissed, standing in a fight stance a few feet away from Billy. Jonathan could only absentmindedly tug at his collar until he saw Billy peer around Steve, glaring at him in the eyes.

He stepped past Steve as he started walking towards where Jonathan was in the middle of the parking lot. “You takin’ your boyfriend out on a *date*, huh?” His tongue pierced like venom into Jonathan’s skin with each word.

“You really do think you’re funny, don’t you-” Steve yelled, walking up behind Billy and grabbing him by the collar of his shirt. He went down, Steve throwing him to the asphalt and following with stomping his foot on Billy’s chest. Billy grunted, trying to grab Steve’s boot, but Steve only pressed down harder and Jonathan could only worry that something could go awry.

“One, if you threaten to hurt Jonathan- *ever* again- you’re gonna get a lot more than my foot on your chest.” Steve’s face was red as he spoke his words, and Jonathan knew they weren’t just empty threats. It was honestly an amazing feeling, finally having someone to stick up for him when he needed it, but he had to withhold his praise until after this conflict finished.

“Two- if I hear word of you ever putting another hand on your sister, you’ll get a lot more than the black eye I’ve already given you. You got that, Hargrove?” He quipped, finally pressing down with his boot one last time before picking it back up, leaving Billy coughing on the ground.

“Don’t cream yourself, Harrington.” He mumbled, and Steve obviously only ignored him and started walking back over to Jonathan. He wanted to grab his hand and just get out of here, but he couldn’t warn Steve when Billy came up behind him and grabbed his hair, pulling him to the ground.

“Steve!” He yelled, watching as Steve’s head impacted hard with the road. He didn’t know whether to try and do something or just stand on the sidelines. He cringed when Billy picked Steve up from the road, just to hit him back down with a punch right to his cheekbone. He could see blood trickling from his cheek, in the same way that his own fell from his face when Billy had beat him up a few days prior.

He couldn’t pay attention much more. He tried to completely tune himself as he stood motionless in front of the group of people that were crowding around them, people pouring out from the arcade doors mumbling the words, “*There’s a fight in the parking lot! Billy Hargrove, and Steve Harrington!*” He looked around at all the faces surrounding him, and he suddenly felt like he was about to faint.

It wasn’t until he heard the security guards from the arcade come out to the scene when he finally paid attention to what was happening in the circle. Steve had Billy pinned down to the ground, layering punch after punch, being cheered on by the people crowding around them. He felt like screaming at Steve to stop, because with the way that Billy was bleeding, it wasn’t good, and that it had gone too far.

He ran into the circle, grabbing him by the shoulders. Steve pulled

back in protest, maybe not fully understanding it was him trying to drag him out. Jonathan only grasped his shoulders harder, screaming "Steve, stop! Stop, please, get out of it!" It didn't seem like it was working, and Jonathan felt like he was about to cry, because now with his hands restrained, Steve was resorting to kicking Billy in the stomach. Billy was already unconscious, and it was obvious that the group around them was starting to get less enthusiastic when they saw the amount of damage inflicted. "Steve, please!" He yelled again, dragging him up and to his feet. Tears were stinging the corners of his eyes when he finally shook Steve out of his stupor. Steve took a double take from Jonathan, and then to Billy, laying on the ground. It was obvious that he realized what he had done fairly quickly- he grabbed Jonathan's hand and sped them to the car.

Billy must have regained consciousness. "I'm gonna *ruin* you, Harrington!" He yelled, Jonathan and Steve both not daring to look back. Jonathan could only clench onto Steve's hand harder as they jumped into the car and sped off.

"What the *fuck*, " Steve started, his face bloody and his hands jittery on the steering wheel. They were going well over the speed limit and Jonathan was running through a surge of emotions in his mind- none of them good. "What the *fuck?!*" Steve yelled, hitting his hand on the steering wheel as he slammed on his breaks at a stoplight, probably not even realizing that there were kids about the cross. Jonathan was getting increasingly worried, if not scared, about Steve's thought process right now. He didn't know if he was angry, or scared of what would happen- Jonathan sure was. Billy said that he'd ruin them, and if that meant what he thought it meant, then yeah, he'd sure be ruined.

"Why did you pull me out, Jonathan? Why did you do that?" Steve asked, starting to go at full speed at the road again. Jonathan didn't know how to respond, because he felt that if he responded in any way, Steve would get angry at him. And start yelling. And this situation was all too familiar. He felt his stomach churning, and he felt like he could puke at any given second, and he was sure that if he spoke one word it would just come out as a cry.

"You were lost, Steve. You kept hitting, and hitting, and-" He choked up, feeling tears start to flow freely out of his eyes. "You could have

killed him! You could have fucking killed him, Steve.” He flinched when Steve hit the steering wheel once again and continued to speed down the road.

“Why don’t you want that? Don’t you see the fucking *pain* he and his friends put you through every day, Jonathan? Do you see that? I see your face every fucking day, every day when you go to the woods before school starts just to stay away from him, when he fucking *terrorizes you*, why wouldn’t you want him dead?” Steve hissed. Jonathan didn’t know what to do, it felt like the walls of the car were closing in on him, and Steve’s enraged yelling caused him to go into a downward spiral. Tears were flowing from his eyes like a raging river, even though he wasn’t making any noise. He clutched the handle of the door and mumbled out a quiet, “Stop the car, stop the car,” while he doubled over. The car came skidding to a stop as it pulled over on the side of the road, somewhere where there were no houses or businesses, and Jonathan didn’t take another look around before opening the door and hurling on the ground. He couldn’t stop it, it was just the fact that he was becoming so hazed from Steve yelling at him and the way that the crying was making him feel weak.

“I’m okay, I’m okay,” He stuttered, walking out of the car, somewhat stumbling with the first step out. He began to pace and hold his head in his hands, and his breathing was becoming erratic as he took wrong steps out of his place. Everything was becoming way too much, and it was even worse when Steve walked out of the car and tried to touch him. “Don’t touch me, not right now, please-” He said, shifting himself away from Steve’s grasp and rubbing his hands down his face. He felt like he was gonna puke again, or start crying, or just scream, but he could only reduce himself to breathing heavily and cracking his knuckles over and over again, his fingers jittery and missing their target almost every time.

“Jonathan,” Steve whispered, trying to walk closer to Jonathan where he was standing towards the edge of the woods off their side of the road.

“Steve, Steve, stop, let me breathe,” He started to cry, pushing Steve away as he covered his face with his hands, shaking his head back and forth as he started to hyperventilate. This was the worst

breakdown he's had in months. Years, maybe.

Billy's words kept ringing through his head. He'd ruin them, wouldn't he? He had reign over their school, and pretty much everything Billy says goes. He'd tell everyone how Steve beat him up over Jonathan, how he went rampant after what he said to him- he'd tell everyone how they ran away from the scene holding hands.

"Fuck, we were *holding hands* , Steve." Jonathan whispered, choking through his tears.

"What do you mean, do you not want to hold my hand?" Steve asked, a surprised scoff following his sentence, starting to pace himself.

"When we left, we were holding hands, why the *fuck* did we do that?" Jonathan sighed, facepalming himself.

"Weren't you okay with that, like, just last night, Jonathan? Are you not okay with it anymore?" Steve retorted, his tone of voice growing louder as he stood with his hands on his hips. Jonathan was trying his best to keep himself still, standing in front of him and wiping the tears from his cheeks. "Do you not remember the reason I almost *killed* him, Jonathan? I did that for you. He started talking about you and something- a switch flipped." Steve sighed, closing his eyes, taking a deep breath, and opening them again. "I did that for you. You can't go back on me now."

"I *never* said I was with you, Steve! I never fucking said that!" He yelled, throwing his hands down by his sides and clenching his fists. "I've seen what you do to people, Steve. You put up an act in front of them and you ditch them five months later, that's what you do! You might act like you care about me now, but you're gonna leave one day, and I know that!" His voice reached the treetops, and Steve only stood in shock in front of him. He started to cry again, his face getting red and his breathing becoming erratic again. "I don't want you to leave, and I'm scared to admit that, aren't I? I'm sitting here, breaking down because I know you're gonna *hate me* after Billy goes yelling to people that we're probably just *fucking* each other, and you're gonna leave, and I'm just going to have to accept it!"

"Jonathan, please-" Steve tried to extend his hand out to Jonathan

with an empathetic look on his face, only to be returned with Jonathan shaking his head aggressively and holding himself as he continued on his rant.

“It’s pathetic, I’m pathetic! I’m fucking pathetic and you still sit here and tell me that it’s okay and I don’t understand. How are you not worried? People are going to laugh at you, they’re going to call you a queer, you’re going to start getting beat up just like I am! I won’t be able to protect you, and I can’t live with that-”

“Jonathan, please, please just listen to me!” Steve snapped, walking towards Jonathan and ignoring his pleas saying “*Stop, stop, get off!*” as he held him in a tight embrace, listening as Jonathan started to aggressively cry in the crook of his neck. “Do you remember what I said? What I said about how no matter what people say, I’m gonna be here for you. No matter what people do, no matter how much they say behind their backs, I’m here to protect you. Don’t forget that.” He held Jonathan in his arms for longer than he should have for it to be considered platonic. But at this point, both of them knew that whatever they had wasn’t platonic.

Jonathan continued to cry in his arms, and Steve kept them there, swaying in the gentle breeze of the afternoon. The sun was laying towards the west, a few hours to sunset. Jonathan didn’t know how to feel as he stood in Steve’s arms, his arms hanging lifelessly at his sides as his crying finally subsided and came the feeling of complete fatigue.

“I want to go home.” He whispered, his arms coming to wrap around Steve’s frame languidly. He sighed and let his head relax into Steve’s neck, finally letting himself breathe regularly for the first time in the past ten to fifteen minutes. He felt Steve nod, and when they detached, they didn’t look at each other. They walked into the car, and Steve started it without saying a word. They started driving down the street, and Jonathan couldn’t bring himself to say anything as he started out of the window, worried he would say something wrong and break the silence. The silence wasn’t comforting, but he would scared that Steve would start yelling again.

When Jonathan did look up, he was confused. They were riding down Mirkwood, which was not the way to Steve’s house. “Where are we

going?" He piped up, cutting the silence.

"I'm taking you home." Steve answered, his voice slightly cold.

"I said- I don't-" He tripped up and he sighed, and he knew there would be no easy way to say this. "I want to go back home. With you."

"Oh." Steve whispered, stopping the car in the middle of the road. "Really?" He asked, looking over to Jonathan. He smiled when Jonathan nodded his head yes, and Jonathan couldn't help but smile back. It was nice to see him happy, especially with how crappy he was feeling on the inside. Steve turned the car around and started driving towards his own house, somewhere that Jonathan called home.

Jonathan placed his hand on the center console, not daring to look at Steve and what he would do if his gesture got rejected. But, Jonathan was reassured that no, Steve would never reject him, when he felt Steve's warm hand clasp around his. He smiled as he looked out the window once again, seeing the other half of town that he had only recently familiarized himself with once he had started to go to Steve's house more.

For some reason, Jonathan felt safe. It was okay to be safe, he told himself, it was okay to feel safe with Steve Harrington.

He was here to help him feel safe.

Notes for the Chapter:

follow me on tumblr for more stonathan drabbles
and stranger things shit!! @lillianthekidd

1. (wasn't a song for this one)
2. "Something Good Can Work" by Two Door Cinema Club
3. "All I Need" by The Frights
4. "I Know You All Over Again" by Trixie Mattel

6. Heart Made of Metal

Summary for the Chapter:

Steve is so, so in love, but he doesn't know how to express it.

Notes for the Chapter:

IM SO SORRY THIS TOOK SO LONG i have no other excuses other than just pure procrastination and writers block. i hope this is good yall its unbeta'd (none of my chapters are, i hope yall realize that)

chapter title is from "heart made of metal" by post animal

Steve was having a *moment*, if you want to call it that.

When Jonathan and him had finally gotten back to his house, Jonathan's first plan was to fall asleep. He had nothing wrong with that, no, he saw the way the kid just broke down and he'd be confused if he *wasn't* already half asleep. Even himself was worn out, because seeing someone you love breakdown like that wasn't fun. Neither was the fact that he knew he never had experienced it, so in no way could he even try to relate to what Jonathan just went through. When Steve had to slam the breaks and pull over to the side of the road, he knew something was wrong and he knew he had fucked up, and the feeling only got worse when Jonathan bolted out of the door to retch on the edge of the woods. He jumped out of the car right behind him, trying to follow his footsteps as he started to pace. He had never seen someone act like this- hell he's never seen someone break down this bad. He had anxiety attacks sometimes, and sometimes things got too much, but he never got to the point where he wasn't worried that the whole town was watching him.

Watching the sunset alone was a feeling he could never get used to. Even though he's rarely had anyone to sit next to him as they watched the sun dip over the horizon, there was always part of him that said that he *should* have someone there, sitting next to him,

whispering sweet nothings to him. Seeing Jonathan on the other side of the room, encased in the blankets and sleeping blissfully, made the strings in his heart pull even harder. He sat on the edge of his window, which was completely open, and let the breeze blow his hair in all crazy directions.

He was overcome with a weird sense of calm as the air became cooler, and the streetlights began to turn on. Steve was always seen as a crazy party kid- someone who had a new girl over every day of the week that ended in -y. No one had ever seen the side of him that was calm, collected, easy going. Now, Jonathan was the first name on the top of the list and he wasn't sure if he wanted him to stay alone in ink forever. It was an unnatural feeling to figure out that he was letting someone in, but he didn't think more of it. It was fine.

Close to eight thirty, Jonathan was still asleep. Steve was getting bored of sitting in his window and he kept looking back to the boy in his bed- each time wishing that he would flutter his eyes open and say his name, beckoning him into the bed with him. But, his hopes fell each time he looked back to him. He climbed out of the window and set foot back down onto the carpet of his room. He took quiet steps over to Jonathan's body, covered by blankets, and checked to make sure he was at least still breathing. He placed his hand in front of his face, feeling the perfectly timed inhaleds and exhaleds and quieted the small concerns in his head that he was harbouring the dead body of his best friend.

As he stood up and looked around the room, he realized how lonely and dark it was without Jonathan to light the room up (with his smile, of course, but Steve wouldn't admit that even if he could admit he was in love.) His guitar sat in the corner by the window, collecting dust once again because he knew he wouldn't play it unless Jonathan asked him to. He remembered the way Jonathan erupted into an immediate smile the moment he started strumming- and he'd give up anything to see it again.

Instead of moping around the room like he was doing right now, Steve decided to pick up some clean clothes and take a shower. It was eight thirty by now, and he was positive that by the time he got out, Jonathan would be awake. So, he opened the door with extreme caution and closed it with the same amount, being careful to not

wake the boy up. Once he had successfully exited the room, he waltzed down the hallway with quiet feet to get to the bathroom.

Like pretty much everyone else, Steve had his usual thinking sessions in the shower and in the shower only. It started when he stripped himself of his clothes, and the steam from the hot water was the equivalent to information soup that inspired all of his weird thoughts he came up with. Today's information soup, though, was not leaving him with pleasant ideas.

He had climbed into the shower with the intention of clearing his mind, even though he knew that that would definitely not happen, or maybe brainstorm some things that him and Jonathan could do for the upcoming science fair project. He's never done anything worth more than a C for anything in science, but the way that he remembers Jonathan's eyes lighting up the moment it was announced, and the eager way he asked Steve to partner with him, he's inspired to do something worthy of at least a B+.

Speaking of Jonathan, and his actions. This information soup that the hot shower was supplying only seemed to be supplying him with bad thoughts. As the water hit his face and dripped off into the drain, he thought, "*What if this happens again?*" By this, he means Jonathan breaking down like this, *because of him, nonetheless*, and he knew that he wouldn't be able to do that again. It made him feel terrible to watch it, and it was incredibly tense the entire car ride home. He wouldn't wish an experience like that on even his worst enemy.

It was also extremely risky to be hanging out with Jonathan like this. Why did he never think that if he, Steve Harrington, was seen out with Jonathan Byers, of all people...he wouldn't be mocked? Maybe it would be better to just cut it off- he could go back to being regular Steve, parties every weekend, getting drunk, flirting with girls, and coming home wasted and sad and lonely. He'd just stop talking to Jonathan as much in school, move his seat next to Nicole Brooks, maybe, in science. Stop waiting for him to show up to his car once school ends and stop only getting up and having the motivation to see him in the middle of the night.

Wait, what was he thinking? He couldn't just leave Jonathan like that, Lord knows that if he stopped talking to him he would have his

own breakdown. He shook his head and shook off water from his hair, backing away from the stream of the shower head. He's breathing hard because he's angry at himself for even thinking that he'd leave him- especially with what Jonathan said earlier. It would only be exactly like him to leave him behind, just like Jonathan said that he's done to everyone, and if he wanted to prove anyone wrong he wanted it to be him. He also thinks back to what he said in the darkroom, *"For as long as we are friends, I don't care what other people call me. As long as I am here to protect you, you don't need to worry about me. I can take care of myself. And, while I do that, I'm taking care of you, you got that?"* He had to stay true to his word, because any man who didn't stick to their word wasn't a man.

Steve found himself clenching his fists, and took a deep breath before he punched a hole in the wall or something similar. He opts for rather putting his forehead to the shower wall, the droplets of the shower catching on his back. He was angry. Angry at himself and a bunch of other things, even though he didn't know what those other things were. He just knew that he couldn't- he's never been this angry at himself. Maybe he's angry that he didn't try to help Jonathan more than he did when they were on the side of the road. Maybe he's angry because he didn't have enough self control to stop himself from bashing Billy's face in, in front of Jonathan's eyes. He'd honestly be surprised if Jonathan woke up and didn't ask to leave because he saw that he was pretty much a cold blooded monster. Maybe he's angry because he hasn't confessed his love to Jonathan Byers yet.

When he walked out of the bathroom, clad in pajamas at nine o'clock, Jonathan was slowly opening his eyes and stretching his arms past the headboard.

"Morning, sunshine." He said, walking over to close the window that he had obviously forgotten about before he went to the shower.

"Is it really morning?" Jonathan whispered, rubbing his eyes. Steve looked back to him and tried to suppress a smile when he realized how beautiful he looked with his shaggy hair and confused look on his face.

"No, I was kidding. It's like, nine." He laughed, sitting down on the bed next to Jonathan. Jonathan scoffed and laid his face back down

into the pillow, covering himself with the blanket once more.

“Come cuddle me.” He said, his voice muffled from his head being completely submerged under the covers.

Steve chuckled and laid down next to Jonathan on the bed. “Weren’t you like, too afraid to ask that last night?” He tucked himself under the covers and wrapped his arm around Jonathan anyway, but he pulled away when Jonathan hissed.

“You’re fucking cold!” He groaned, pulling his body away from Steve. “I was also in full consciousness last night. Are you gonna cuddle me or not?” Jonathan flipped over to face Steve, the look on his face equivalent to a toddler when they want something.

“You just said I was too cold, Byers!” He defended, even though he was already inching closer to Jonathan to wrap his arms around him again.

“Well, now I’ll be ready for it.” He mumbled, closing his eyes again and scooting in closer to Steve’s chest. He felt warm in his chest, and it got so quiet in the room that Steve could hear his own heartbeat and maybe Jonathan’s if he focused.

“You know what they say about cold hands, Steve?” Jonathan whispered, his head buried in the crook of Steve’s neck. Steve sighed and said a quiet “What?” and shrugged it off when Jonathan didn’t respond after a few seconds.

“Cold hands, cold heart.” He finally whispered, so quiet Steve almost didn’t hear it, but it was enough to get his eyes to open wide and looking down at Jonathan, who was sleeping soundly in his arms.

Maybe he was hearing things.

Steve had pried his hand off of Jonathan when he woke up, close to three a.m. He didn’t know what motivated him to do so, but he did. He looked up to the ceiling, laying on his back as Jonathan laid next to him in a fetal position, hogging all the blankets. He looked back

over at Jonathan, and couldn't help but smile because it was one of the first times that he knew he'd have a good memory in this house.

He looked over to the window, the curtains slightly parted to show a hard, torrential rain, and something tugged in his stomach, something as uncomfortable of the idea of walking outside in that downpour.

As this feeling continued to pull in his stomach, he picked himself up from the bed carefully to make sure that he didn't wake Jonathan up. He sat on the edge, looking out at the window again as he ran his hand through his hair, taking a deep breath. He got up to his closet at the corner of the room and grabbed a raincoat, pulled it on, and walked to the window to pry it open. When he did, the sound of rain was louder than he thought it would be, and he looked back over to Jonathan with a sinking feeling in his legs, of all places, scared that he woke him up. Seeing Jonathan's eyes still closed and breathing even, he reassured himself as the coast was clear and he turned his attention back outside. He picked a leg up out of his room out to the roof, and he hoisted his body out. He was fairly sure his life flashed before his eyes as he would've slipped off the roof if he hadn't grasped the edge of his window at the last minute. He let go the moment he regained his center, even though he was sure his legs would give out this time in fear of waking the other boy up. He slid off the roof with no grace and landed his ass into the bushes. He groaned in pain even as he picked himself up, already regretting his decision to walk in the rain. But, he's out here, and he can't go back now.

For a moment, he stood in the grass behind his house with close to no care in the world as he felt the rain fall down on him. Maybe he should have brought an umbrella, maybe he shouldn't have, but either way, the cold of each raindrop felt soothing on his bruised face. He stepped out of his driveway for a moment, into the road, and looked back to his car sitting on the pavement. It was three thirty and there was *one* twenty four hour convenience store down the street- and he was really craving a slushie right now.

He felt around in his back pocket and felt his keys almost bulging out- he pulled them out and ran to his car in a haste. He strapped himself in and cringed as he sat down on the seat with wet pants, and

wet everything, really. He pulled down the driver's mirror and looked at himself- his hair was pressed down, making him look like a completely different person. He flipped the mirror back up as he turned the ignition, grabbed the steering wheel and looked behind him as he pulled out of the driveway.

There was one, sole worker in the convenience store. She looked at Steve with a *look* in her eyes as the overhead door bell jingled, signaling his waltz into the empty room and feeling extremely awkward. He stuffed his hands in his pockets as he walked away in what could have been masked as just hurried-ness, but was truly embarrassment. Everyone in the small town of Hawkins, Indiana was usually asleep by now, except for the people just traveling through. Because, that was all the traffic they got. Just people traveling through.

Steve made his way over to the drinks and grabbed himself a blueberry slushie- the one his mom always told him to not get. She said it had too much sugar, it was riddled in food dye, whatever she wanted to say to control him and what he did. Now that she was out of the picture, he didn't have to care what went into his stomach. As long as he liked it, which was never something he got to enjoy with his mom around, food or not.

With his slushie in hand, he walked over to the candy aisle and grabbed himself a twix (maybe two) and stopped when his mind drifted to Jonathan. He'd never told him what his favorite candy was, nor he guessed would he ever have the reason to. He looked around the shelves in a frenzy, trying to decide what seemed more *Jonathan*. Something a nerd like him would like.

He ended up grabbing one of everything, because after standing at the shelves for so long he started to realize how much of an idiot he looked like. He probably looked like even more of an idiot, though, when he walked up to the cash register where this poor old lady was sitting, half asleep, probably waiting for life to be over, and dropped his handful of candy (and a half-drunk slushie) onto the counter.

She looked at him with a half-glare and started to scan his items. He

looked at her and sucked his teeth, rocking on the heels of his feet just for this to be over. He stuffed his hands in his pockets and watched the price go up- ten bucks to twelve, twelve bucks to sixteen. It stopped at seventeen with some extra change and Steve really hoped that he even had that much cash on him. He dug around in his pockets and pulled out a few dollar bills and a wet, paper thin five and slammed it on the counter. He acted like he failed to realize that it was only nine dollars. He stammered as he looked to the door and back to the counter, then looking at his watch. It was three fifty, and he thought about Jonathan still laying in bed, probably awake because he left the window open, and scared out of his mind because Steve wasn't there. He couldn't bare for Jonathan to have another breakdown like he did earlier, especially because of him again. He looked down the the counter of the store as a thought popped into his head.

"Look, uh." He mumbled, looking at the register lady's tag. "Margaret. Look, I gotta get home to uh, my, dad. He's uh, sick. Yeah. My dad, he's sick. So, can you just, uh, maybe, put the rest on a tab for me?" He struggled, trying to get through his lie with a straight face. No matter what she said, he was already shoving his things into his jacket pockets and holding his slushie in his hand, and before she could wake up enough to yell at him he was already out of the door.

He jumped in his car and stuffed the candy in an empty bag behind him, and turned on the ignition to speed off. If he went quick, he could make it back home in three minutes. He decided to do just that as he slammed the gas pedal once he got on the main road, speeding through stop signs, because the cops couldn't catch him at four a.m.

He finally pulled up to his house after almost hitting a stray cat and spilling his slushie. His heart was still racing and he had to grab the bag of candy behind him with shaking hands, and when he stepped back outside into the rain, it shocked him back to reality. It hit hard and cold on his face and he spat out a leaf that had came down with the wind, shaking his head to rid his hair of the droplets of water that were already getting into his eyes.

He looked up the the side of the house that held his window. The

rain had died down but in no way did that mean he wanted to try and climb back up to get to it, and suddenly in a burst of fifth grade intelligence he remembers that he owns a front door. It's four o'clock in the morning and he just had one of the worst driving experiences of his life- you can't blame him for being a little slow at the moment.

He clutched the gas station bag in one hand and his slushie in the other, barreling towards the front door and stumbling inside. He ran up the steps and dropped the bag outside of his door, fumbling as he jiggled the door handle and quietly walked in. He dropped his slushie on the nightstand next to the empty side of the bed, and he contemplated just getting in because he was so tired. He opted against it when he remembered that his clothes were soaking wet, and walked over to the closet instead to get a new pair of pajamas.

He undressed quickly, but every few seconds looked back over to the bed in fear Jonathan would wake up to an ass-bare Steve Harrington. Thankfully, Jonathan's eyes never opened, and Steve's heart raced for no reason.

He climbed back in bed next to the boy, the boy who immediately moved over to his warmth even though he was asleep, and Steve sighed as Jonathan got comfortable laying by his chest, his head in the crook of his neck. He wrapped his arm around him, looking down at his head of dirty blond hair, and one thought crossed Steve's mind as he felt Jonathan's steady breathing on his chest.

What they had was not platonic. Between the holding hands, the feeling that Steve got when he saw him, the way that Jonathan's face lit up when he said something flattering, the way that Jonathan was laying in his arms now, he knew that whatever this was wasn't just friendship. But, if he asked to take it any farther, would it be reciprocated? He's never had a boyfriend, hell, he's only ever fantasized about boys, but he knew he liked them. The way that Jonathan made him feel was different than any way a girl had. Neither Nancy nor Nicole made him feel like his head was all fogged up, he never wanted to spend every waking moment with them- but with Jonathan, he wanted to see his face every morning when he woke up and every night when he went to bed. He was the first one he could ever say he looked forward to going to school for. Jonathan was sure to feel the same, with the way that he would ask to hold his

hands, how defensive and protective he got over him, the way that his cheeks would be brushed with a soft red when Steve complimented him...that's not how teenage boys act with friends, especially male friends.

Maybe he was thinking too hard. Why wouldn't Jonathan like him back? The signs were there, and if they weren't, Steve wouldn't have given him the smallest kiss on the top of his hair before he finally drifted off to sleep.

The thoughts of loving Jonathan Byers were still in his head when Jonathan woke him up by shaking him and pushing on his arm, mumbling "Steve, *Steve*, I want food." in the cutest morning voice. Steve could only clutch onto him harder, keeping him in the bed and laughing along quietly while Jonathan groaned in protest like a toddler.

Yeah, he was sure that this was not just what friends did.

It took them a while to fully wake up and get ready. Steve pulled on clothes that he didn't know were dirty or not- Jonathan stayed in the clothes he had on when he went to sleep. They ate while they cleaned up the house a small bit, because Steve wasn't sure when his dad would be getting back, but either way he didn't really care.

On the drive back to Jonathan's house, Steve's gaze shifted from the road to the way that Jonathan's fingers tapped on his thigh.

"Is there something wrong, Jon?" He asked, his fingers tapping, too, on the steering wheel along to the beat of some random song playing quietly in the background. It phased in and out of white noise as they drove across the roads where it wasn't as populated. Steve shifted his gaze back over to Jonathan when he didn't answer, and saw his fingers tapping at his thighs once again. "You can tell me anything, you know." He added, the hum of the car overlapping the static of the radio and masking Jonathan's deep breathing.

"I don't like being without you, it's weird." Jonathan whispered, and Steve almost didn't hear it.

"I don't like being without you either, Jon, if it makes you feel any better."

"Why do you hang out with me so much?" Jonathan asked, his voice even quieter than the first sentence he spoke.

"Because I like you." Steve answered, looking over to Jonathan in the passenger seat. His head was lowered and he was looking at his feet, and Steve's heart ached.

"It's weird." Jonathan spoke, his head raising to look to the road, and then looking over to Steve. The look in his eyes read something of hurt. He couldn't decipher it, but maybe it was also something of his heart aching, just like Steve's did.

"What's weird?" Steve asked, moving his hand to rest on the center console, his palm open as if it was inviting Jonathan's to lay in it. Jonathan did just that, but not without a second's hesitation.

"Us. We're weird."

"How so?"

"We hold hands." Jonathan gestured, clutching Steve's hand harder. "We go on midnight walks together. You hold me when I cry. You didn't walk out on me after my breakdown."

"Jonathan, can I tell you something?" Steve asked, automatically feeling his heart laying in his throat and feeling it pulse with every pump of blood. He tried his best to keep it cool on the outside so he could freak out on the inside.

"Yeah, sure, Steve." Jonathan sighed, looking out of the window. Was Steve about to do this? Yes, yes he was.

"I really do like you." He said, his hand clutching Jonathan's over the center console. He felt sweat gather on his forehead and his hand on the steering wheel was slipping.

"I like you too, Steve." Jonathan whispered, his hand repeating the same movements that Steve's was. Sweating and clammy, their hands both grasped onto each other hard in the middle of Steve's old BMW

M35i.

“That’s good.” Steve chuckled nervously, shifting his position in his seat.

“Yeah.” Jonathan mumbled, his hand in Steve’s losing it’s grip and laying dead, almost.

Steve dropped Jonathan off and he couldn’t help but think that he fucked it all up. Why didn’t he ask him out? Why didn’t he say something more than what he did? He had gotten over the hard part and now he knew that Jonathan liked him, and of course he had to do it in the fucking car of all places, but he couldn’t ask Jonathan a simple, “*well, do you want to go see a movie tomorrow night?*” or maybe just “*well, do you want to be my boyfriend, then?*” Because how happy he would be right now if he could call Jonathan Byers his was something he could not fathom. He hit the steering wheel in frustration as he sped past the sign that said Mirkwood, and he moved his hand towards the dial on the radio to blast the volume. He didn’t care what was on, he just needed to drown out his thoughts that were telling him what he should have and shouldn’t have done.

He pulled up to his house and stomped in the door, his temper already flaring. It only got worse when he saw his father walking around in the kitchen, dirtying it all up and ruining the cleaning he and Jonathan had done earlier. He didn’t know what his father was thinking, walking around like he owned the place. His name might be on the lease, but Steve was the one that did everything. Everything was getting on his nerves, and when his father turned around and said “Hey, Steve, thanks for cleaning up.” It only set him off even more.

“Fuck you.” He said, standing in the archway of the kitchen, staring his father in the eyes. “You’re standing there, ruining the kitchen, eating the food that I pay for, when you are only home for close to a weekend a month. The only fucking reason I bet you’re coming home so often now is because you know I’m hanging out with a boy.”

Steve’s father turned around from where he was standing overhead the counter. The look in his eyes was the same look he had when he

was about to pull out his belt like he did when Steve was little, or when he was about to throw fists once Steve got a little older. He looked his son in the eyes and it only lit Steve's flame more, setting him off to walk closer to his father and stand directly in his face. "Guess what, Dad. Your son's a queer, queer with the Byers boy, and you can't stop me. If you even lay a fucking *finger* on me right now, you'll be surprised when for once under this fucking roof I fight back. I'm sick and tired of you thinking that I'll keep listening to you and taking your punches when all you do when you sit in this house is eat my food and judge what *I'm* doing. I'm sick of it. So help me god if you keep doing it." Steve hissed, backing away from his father. His dad dared not speak, and Steve clutched his hands as he chuckled when he walked away, his long awaited dream of his father faltering coming true.

But then he slowly realized how angry he still was. He thought that standing up to his father would make him feel better, he'd be on top of the world, but no. Jonathan Byers was still on his mind and he wishes he could say that what he said to his father was the truth, he was in fact not dating Jonathan yet, and that's why he was angry. He slammed his door behind him with a strength he knew he only had when he was angry, and he stood in the front of his room for a moment. He felt like he was angry enough to have smoke coming out of his ears like in the cartoons.

How hard could it have been for him to just say one more thing to Jonathan? He was probably sitting at home now, angry at Steve, or crying in his bed because maybe since Steve didn't ask him out then that maybe this was all one sick joke. It felt like Steve's heart was punched and left with such a terrible ache when he thought about Jonathan crying, and instead of getting angrier, he start to feel tears sting at his eyes too.

If he had just said three words. *I love you*. Maybe five. *I love you, Jonathan Byers* . What he wishes he really said was more along the lines of one hundred.

Jonathan Byers, I love you with all my heart, and I'm so happy I've met you. You make me want to get up in the morning when I know I'll see your face right next to mine, and you'd never know that I give you the tiniest of kisses on your head when you're asleep. I love you, I love you, I

love you more than you could ever know and I want to spend the rest of my damn life with you.

But all he said to him was “That’s good.”

Was it?

Notes for the Chapter:

DLKJDKLDHNLKDFNLKUF

sorry

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